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OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

VOLUME TWO

From the Establishment of the Kingdom
Under Saul

Written for the
Deseret Sunday School Union
By Dr. Joseph M. Tanner

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PREFACE

This work has been prepared in two volumes as a text-book for the Deseret Sunday School Union. Its object is to cultivate a familiarity with the language of the Bible, to awaken an interest in Sacred History, and to develop a love for the truths contained in this, the best known and most widely read of all books.

The Old Testament unfolds the history, teachings, aim and hopes of a peculiar race in a manner unparalleled by any other book. Its chief value, however, lies in the teachings of the relationship of man to God. Its influence for good reaches through centuries, and its teachings become a guide to individual conduct.

It is sincerely hoped that the text will stimulate home preparation for class work on the part of students, and to this end the services of the parents are earnestly solicited to give encouragement and guidance. The reading of scriptural passages aloud in the home by the student as a preparation will afford an excellent opportunity for familiarizing him with the style of language used in the Bible, and will serve to impress upon him the force and the world of thought therein contained. The memorization of choice passages is always to be commended.

The limitations put upon the book were such

that much valuable subject matter had to be omitted. The student, therefore, will do well to supplement the text book by the study of special passages of scripture and other references bearing upon the subject under discussion.

The review questions are intended not merely to fix the facts of the lesson in the mind, but to cultivate a habit of thoroughness in reading. "Repetition is the mother of learning." The questions for discussion are given to encourage reasoning by the wider application of Bible teaching to general knowledge and the application of what is learned to the conduct of daily life. They should further encourage a spirit of investigation and the practice of home reading. Second and repeated thoughts are more helpful, intellectually and religiously, than the mere cursory reading of the text.

It will be helpful to the students of Old Testament history if additional time be given to a careful study of Proverbs and the Psalms. These books throw special light on the underlying thoughts, feelings, and character of Israelitish life. They are also the sources of much of the wisdom and literature of the subsequent ages. **Individual** guidance may be aided very greatly by a familiarity with the teachings of these books.

It is hoped that the quotations will lead to a greater desire on the part of students to read and study all the books of the Old Testament and to acquire a deeper insight into the Bible and from it into life itself.

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Old Testament Studies

CHAPTER 1

SAUL, THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL

(I Sam. 9-15)

Man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As make the angels weep.—Shakespeare.

To Samuel was entrusted, under the direction of the Lord, the choice of the first king of Israel. The two most powerful tribes of Israel were those of Judah and Joseph. Joseph, however, was represented in Ephraim and Manasseh. The weakest tribe of Israel was that of Benjamin, which a short time before had been almost entirely annihilated.

“Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power.

“And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than

he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people."^a

Meeting of Saul and Samuel. Kish had lost some of his animals, and had sent his son Saul and one of his servants out in quest of them. And when they came to the land of Zuph, after hunting for them for some time in the neighborhood of Samuel's home, Saul sought out the prophet in order that he might perchance learn through him where his animals were.

("Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.) * * * *

"And they went up into the city: and when they were come into the city, behold, Samuel came out against them, for to go up to the high place.

"Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying,

"Tomorrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me.

"And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of, this same shall reign over my people.

"Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is.

^aI Samuel 9:1, 2.

“And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer; go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me today, and tomorrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart.

“And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father’s house?

“And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?”^b (Note 1).

When Saul went in and ate with Samuel, “the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day.”^c

The right shoulder was the part of the animal, according to the order of sacrifices, set apart for the priest. Josephus calls it “the royal portion.”

Saul Anointed King. Saul’s humility in the presence of Samuel showed the beautiful simplicity of his nature, and further showed that it was possible for him to be what God wanted him to be. When men are chosen for some divine purpose, they are left their free agency, and although there is within

^bI Samuel 9:9-21.

^cI Samuel 9:24.

them the possibility of accomplishing the mission to which they are called, there is no certainty that they will do so. Their success in a divine mission depends upon their ability to enjoy the companionship of Him who has called them.

“And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us (and he passed on), but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.^d

“Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?”^e

Then Samuel tells Saul by way of assurance of his divine calling, what shall happen to him on his way back to his home. First, he should meet two men at Rachel’s sepulchre at Zelzah; he should meet there men on the plain of Tabor going up to God to Beth-el.

“After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy.

“And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man. * * *

^dI Samuel 9:27.

^eI Samuel 10:1.

“And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do.

“And it was so, that, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day.”^f

He was a choice young man, and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he. And yet God gave him another heart. It is not enough that man should be good in the estimation of his fellow-men. It is not enough that he should be good in the ordinary conduct of life, when he is given a special mission from above. He must be good, as God would have him good,—humble, obedient, prayerful, mindful of the words of the Lord, and zealous in keeping His commandments. He must also be good in his efforts to shun temptation and overcome evils that surround him. Saul could fight the enemy in battle, but the enemies of his daily conduct, his pride, his selfishness, were more than he could vanquish.

And Saul returned to his home to wait upon the Lord,—that trying position into which so many men and women in this world are put. They are impatient. They want to take things into their own hands and put themselves in the place of the Lord, to judge before they are called to do so.

^fI Samuel 10:5-9.

In the course of time, Samuel gathered the tribes of Israel together, and among them he brought the tribe of Benjamin. But Saul even now shrank from making his appearance when the announcement of his calling was to be made before the people, and he hid himself among the stuff (baggage), and had to be brought out by his tribesmen.

“And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.”^g

Samuel sent the people away now, it is said, “every man to his house.” Saul went to his own home in Gibeah, where his tribesmen had formerly treated the Levites in a most shameful manner. It is said that the children of Belial did not receive Saul kindly; that they despised him, and brought him no presents, but that he held his peace, awaiting, no doubt, the time when he might bring them to an accounting.

War Against the Moabites. Soon Saul was given an opportunity to lead his people in battle. The people of Moab, who were not of Israel, resented the possession by the Israelites of the land beyond the Jordan. The report of their position, and their threat to put out the eyes of his brethren in Gilead, came to Saul, as he was going out of the field with a herd,

“And the spirit of God came upon Saul when he

^gI Samuel 10:24.

heard those things, and his anger was kindled greatly.

“And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.”^h

Of these it is said there were 300,000, besides 30,000 from the tribe of Judah. And they went out to battle for their brethren beyond the Jordan. They slew the Ammonites so “that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together.”

The people were now enthusiastic for their young leader, and they desired to put to death those who questioned his right to rule over them.

“And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel.”ⁱ

Samuel, in his old age, addressed the people of Israel in his own behalf, and asked them to witness that his life had been upright in their presence. He repeated the obligations of the people to keep the commandments of God, who had redeemed them out of Egypt and shown them repeated kindnesses, and delivered them from the hands of their oppressors. Finally, Samuel called on the Lord for a

^hI Samuel 11:67.

ⁱI Samuel 11:13.

testimonial: "and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel."

Saul's Army. Saul was not content to do as the judges of Israel had done in calling up the Israelites to fight for their deliverance under the direction and guidance of Jehovah. He began to organize an army for himself.

"Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; whereof two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Beth-el, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeath of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent."^j

Jonathan, the son of Saul, now began war upon the Philistines. Saul justified his own action before the prophet.

"And Samuel said to Saul, Thou has done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

"But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."^k

Saul had also been guilty of offering a burnt offering, contrary to the law prescribed by Moses.

War. War was now renewed between the Israel-

^jI Samuel 13:2.

^kI Samuel 13:13-14.

ites and the Philistines. And Jonathan, the son of Saul, contrary to the covenant of his father to fast the whole day in which they were contending against the enemy, partook of honey which he found by the way. (1 Samuel 14: 43-45)

“Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and, lo, I must die.

“And Saul answered, God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan.

“And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not”¹ (Note 2).

Jonathan had gone to battle without the knowledge of his father, and had been gloriously successful. He had won the hearts of the people, who were now ready to oppose their king.

Saul Disobeys. Finally the test came again. Samuel, the prophet, had trusted Saul to perform another work,—the utter destruction of the Amalekites. He was to slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass, and was to spare nothing from the people. With the Amalekites there were also the Kenites, the tribe to whom Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, belonged.

¹I Samuel 14:43-45.

They were required to separate themselves from the Amalekites, because of the kindness they had shown the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.

“And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt.”^m

But Saul was disobedient again to the injunctions of Samuel. He allowed the people to take the king and the spoil.

“But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal.

“And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

“And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.

“Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord.

“And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee for thou hast rejected the word of the

^mI Samuel 15:7.

Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.

“And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent.

“And Samuel said unto him, The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou.”ⁿ

Agag, the king of the Amalekites, was not to be saved, and the pleadings of Saul were of no avail, because he had been rejected, and another was to take his place.

“Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul.

“And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul; and the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.”^o

Saul was not like David, who was later sorrowful over the sin he had committed, and repented of it. Saul was sorrowful, not because of his sin, but rather because of his punishment. How often it happens in life that men and women feel sorrowful only when punishment overtakes them. They justify their evil conduct until they are called upon to answer, and have to meet the consequences of their evil doing. Notwithstanding all that Saul had seen of the favor which God showed His prophet, he nevertheless sought to set him aside to disregard

ⁿI Samuel 15:21-28.

^oI Samuel 15:34,35.

his words and positive commandments. The authority which had been conferred upon the king was abused, and the abuse of authority is one of the sins which those who hold it must answer for.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How was Saul revealed to the Prophet?
2. If Saul was a choice young man and humble, why did he need "another heart"?
3. In what way did Saul modify the methods of the Judges in carrying on war?
4. Why was war declared against the Moabites?
5. In what way did Saul offend God?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the present day relations between the tribes of Judah and Joseph?
2. What are the dangers of false humility?

NOTES

1. "The third thing to notice about him is his modest disposition. On Samuel calling him to the kingdom you remember his answer—'Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my family the least of all the families of Benjamin? Wherefore then speakest thou to me after this manner?' While pride makes men ridiculous, humility commands admiration and love. But modesty may degenerate into a vice—a vice not particularly common, however, among young men. I would rather have a man over-estimate than under-estimate his powers. While the first mistake may stimulate small talents to the performance of great deeds, the last may prevent great talents from achieving half their possibilities."

2. "There is no ill without its compensation
 And life and death are only light and shade;
 There never beat a heart so base and sordid
 But felt at times a sympathetic glow;
 There never lived a virtue unrewarded
 Nor died a vice without its meed of woe."

CHAPTER 2

THE CALL AND PREPARATION OF DAVID

(I Sam. 16-19)

Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness than he that is perverse in his way though he be rich.—Prov. 28:6.

The Prophet's Grief. The Prophet Samuel was Saul's safe guide. Had Saul listened to his words of warning and heeded his instructions, misfortune would not have overtaken him. Saul had ample testimony that Samuel was called of God, and he knew that the prophet enjoyed divine favor. He also knew that the prophet's life was an upright one. So he had no difficulty in understanding what course he should pursue.

Samuel likewise knew Saul. He had anointed him king, and no doubt admired the beauty of his person, and saw, with divine insight, the great possibilities that were in Saul's life. It was not, therefore, easy for the prophet to give him up. (a)

"And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse, the Beth-lehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.

"And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take a heifer

with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord.

“And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee.”^a

The student may sometimes read from those who would destroy the influence and authority of the Bible that here the Lord was practicing and even commanding duplicity or falsehood. Concealment of one's exclusive rights for a good purpose is justifiable, and in this case the Lord had a perfect right to bring about the anointing of the son of Jesse in any way that He saw fit. Moreover, the call of a new king did not mean that he was to enter immediately upon the duties of his office. He had to be educated, and a part of the education of the new king was to be in the court of Saul.

Saul also was to have the opportunity of revealing his own unworthiness. In other words, Saul was to be made his own judge, so that whatever befell him in the end would be a righteous judgment which his own conduct would show he deserved; and that judgment would in centuries to come be a guide and a warning to others.

When men's hearts are evil they may conceal their thoughts and feelings and appear innocent before their fellow men. No doubt untold thousands go to the grave whose secrets have never been revealed in life to others. However, in the case of men like Saul, whose conduct would be read by

^aI Samuel 16:1-3.

millions of others, there were special reasons why he should not be permitted to die without revealing the evil that was within him. In striking contrast to Saul was the humility and the upright character of Samuel.

David Anointed. “And Samuel did that which the Lord spake, and came to Beth-lehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?

“And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord: sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

“And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord’s anointed is before him.”^b

Eliab was Jesse’s oldest son. He must have had about him a kingly appearance. He was attractive to Samuel,—so attractive that Samuel, with all his spiritual insight, would have selected one not intended by the Lord. Here follows one of the many beautiful passages of the Bible, a passage, like others, that we should be able to call to memory at our will:

“But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

^bI Samuel 16:4-6.

“Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel.”^c

When all of the sons of Jesse who were at hand had appeared before the prophet, Samuel had learned his mistake, and no longer trusted to his own spiritual insight. In the choice of a new king, he awaited the voice of God. “Are here all thy children?” inquired Samuel. No, there was another, the youngest, who must have been thought unimportant by his father. He was herding sheep, perhaps in the beautiful valley that lies next to Bethlehem. When the youngest boy appeared, “he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise anoint him: for this is he.

“Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

“But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.”^d

“An evil spirit from the Lord”! One would naturally say that was a strange place for an evil spirit to come from. There is no difficulty in believing that God may make evil spirits as well as good ones the messengers of His will and purpose. Such an act by Jehovah could by no means be made to convey the idea that Jehovah approved or loved evil spirits.

^cI Samuel 16:7, 8.

^dI Samuel 16:-12-14.

Samuel 16: 1-14 David chosen

Saul's Affliction. From this time, Saul was the victim of evil spirits. They haunted his life until finally it was suggested that music should be made before him to give him relief. To this end David was called by the king, and his harp quieted the feelings of Saul. The young man had already been anointed the future king of Israel. He was now to be educated in the court of a king. Saul's mistakes, Saul's evil spirit, Saul's envy and jealousy and hatred were all manifested towards David, who had an opportunity to learn what he should avoid when he should become king. The spirit and power of God acted wonderfully in David's favor (Note 1).

While he was still in the fields with his flock, the Philistines came upon Israel, and among them was their champion fighter, the giant Goliath, whose height was six cubits and a span. A cubit was measured from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, and is generally estimated at a foot and a half. If this is correct, then Goliath was about nine and a half feet tall. That was an extraordinary height, though giants have been known since then whose size approached very nearly that of Goliath. This champion sent out a challenge to the Israelites, by which he offered to fight any one of their men, with the understanding that the side which lost should be servants to the side whose champion was victorious. David, about the time this challenge was taking place, was sent by his father, who had eight sons, the oldest three of whom were with Saul's army, with provisions to his brothers. (C)

“And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp of thy brethren.”^e

His brethren were then not far from Bethlehem in the valley of Elah. When David’s brethren saw him, and saw that he was asking about this Philistine, they were greatly annoyed. (f)

“And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab’s anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.”^f

Goliath. Then David showed his wonderful faith and courage: (g)

“And David said to Saul, Let no man’s heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

“And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.

“And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock;

“And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose

^eI Samuel 17:17.

^fI Samuel 17:28.

against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

“Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.”^g

Saul armed David with his armor, but David could not move in it. He was fearless in the might of the spirit which was upon him, for God had ordained David to do great and marvelous things.

“And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag which he had, even in a scrip: and his sling was in his hand; and he drew near to the Philistine. * * *

“And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance.

“And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

“And the Philistine said unto David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.

“Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

“This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine

^gI Samuel 17:32-36.

hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

“And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s and he will give you into our hands.

“And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.

“And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.”^h

And it is said that David took the head of Goliath and brought it to Jerusalem. We are not informed that at this time Jerusalem had even been taken from the Jebusites. We know that it was subsequently conquered by David, but it may be that at this time there were Israelites living with the Jebusites in that city.

David and Jonathan. There now comes into the life of David one of those beautiful friendships that so greatly adorn human nature,—a friendship that is almost always quoted to demonstrate true devotion of one to another. It was the friendship of David and Jonathan. David had been taken, as we might now naturally expect, into the army of the

^hI Samuel 17:40-49.

king, to be the king's standard-bearer, to enjoy the favor of the king because of the wonderful thing which he had done in Israel. Thus he was brought into close contact with Saul's son, Jonathan.

We may well imagine that the two were about the same age, and their association together shows that there was a great similarity between them. There was in their characters steadfastness, devotion, and friendship. Friendship always has something of virtue in it when it is sincere, and especially when it is formed for noble purposes. There can be no doubt that God called Jonathan to this mission of friendly relations to the newly anointed, though uncrowned king. How beautifully that friendship is expressed in the words, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

"And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

"Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

"And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

"And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants."ⁱ

ⁱI Samuel 18:1-5

“Behaved himself wisely”! How full of meaning to every young man who modestly, unselfishly and loyally devotes himself to the cause of truth! There is this beautiful quality in David’s life, so far as the Bible reveals it to us, that he never spoke frivolously or contemptuously. He was deeply in earnest, sincere in all that he undertook, and though he had been anointed king, he evidently at this time could not comprehend what it all meant to him. He had accepted a divine ordinance, and he meant to live so that he could enjoy its blessings. For whether men are anointed kings, or appointed to any other mission of divine favor, if they succeed they must act wisely as David did.

Jealousy. But David’s own wisdom could not save him from the distrust and jealousy of Saul. If he acted wisely there were so-called friends and admirers who acted unwisely. One may almost believe that if troubles, and severe ones, are the lot of any person, wisdom can hardly save him from them. Under such circumstances, troubles that are not brought by himself upon himself are brought upon him by others.

“And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistines, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music.

“And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”^j

^jI Samuel 18:6-7.

Such words were too much for Saul. He "was very wroth." "To me," said the king, "they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?"

The following day "the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand."

David undertook by his music to soothe the king, as he had done before. But jealousy is a plant of rapid growth. It soon blossoms into hatred, and oftentimes hatred that is deadly. David's presence before Saul acted upon the king with unusual aggravation, and with a javelin he had in his hand, he sought David's life. "For he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice (Note 2).

"And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul."^k

Evidence this is that when God's favor is upon a man, that man cannot be tolerated by one who has an opposite spirit. It is the similarity of spirits that makes a common cause between men and unites them. Knowledge is not necessarily a source of unity. Saul knew, but his knowledge only provoked him to anger, and made him the more sinful. This circumstance in the life of David and Saul teaches us that salvation, that which is real, ultimate, divine favor, cannot be won by the power of knowledge. Knowledge alone is not really intelli-

^kI Samuel 18:11, 12.

gence. Intelligence is more the product of the spirit which leads men into all truth. Saul knew that God favored David; yet he hated David the more because of it. They were of different spirits. Therefore unity between them was impossible. "And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him."

"But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them."^l

Saul, however, sought the life of David; and to bring about his wicked purpose, he gave to David his daughter in marriage, with the thought that he would deliver the young man into the hands of the Philistines, who might spare Saul the necessity of putting the young king to death himself. He would therefore give his daughter Merab; but when the time arrived, Merab, Saul's daughter, was given to another.

"And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him."^m

But David, in his humility, said, "Who am I? and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son in law to the king?"ⁿ

Coming, as these words did, from the heart of a sincere young man, they reveal the fact that David, although anointed by Samuel, did not realize what his station in life was to be.

David's Marriage. David married Michal, who,

^lI Samuel 18:16.

^mI Samuel 18:20.

ⁿI Samuel 18:18.

like her brother Jonathan, protected him from the anger and murderous designs of their father. Jonathan pleads for David, but the father would not listen, and through Jonathan's devotion to his friend, the secret designs of Saul were made known to David, who thereby escaped the dangers of the king.

Finally David betook himself to Ramah, where Samuel lived, and threw himself upon the protection of the prophet. To Ramah, Saul sent messengers to bring David back. But the Spirit of God was upon them, and they prophesied, and other messengers were sent, and they prophesied also; and on the third day other messengers were sent, and they also prophesied. Then the king went to Ramah himself, and it is said that the Spirit of God was also upon the king, and he prophesied. Saul stripped himself before the prophet and lay before him "all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?"^o (Note 3).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did Saul begin to reveal himself?
2. Relate the calling of David?
3. Relate the contest between David and Goliath.
4. How did the women of Israel endanger David's life?
5. What gave rise to the friendship between David and Jonathan?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are our duties in the matter of frankness toward those who are the enemies of righteousness?
2. What is the difference between the friendships of duty and those of joy?

^oI Samuel 19:24.

NOTES

1. "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there shall Thy hand lead me,
And Thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me;
Even the night shall be light about me.
Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee,
But the night shineth as the day:
The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee."
—Psalms 139:7-12.

2. Foul jealousy! that turnest love divine
To joyless dread, and mak'st the loving heart
With hateful thoughts to languish and to pine.
And feed itself with self-consuming smart:
Of all the passions in the mind thou vilest art.
—Spenser.

3. "There are people who resolve, at any cost, to deal truthfully with their neighbors; they will not deceive, or flatter, or extenuate; truth shall be the law of their lips. Who are these worthy people? They are your censorious and critical friends, whose judgments you know are just, but who are a thorn in your flesh because their judgments are so hard. They interpret you precisely as you are, but they give no credit for that which you are not, but desire to be. It is almost easier to love your enemies and bless those who curse you, than to find pleasure in such friends.

'But of all plagues, good Heaven, Thy wrath can send,
Save, save, O save me from the candid friend.'"
—Peabody.

CHAPTER 3

CALL AND PREPARATION OF DAVID (Continued)

(I Sam. 20-26)

Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth.

—Byron.

David did not feel himself safe even in the presence of the prophet Samuel. His was a young and loving heart, and he would gladly enjoy the favor of the king, whom he regarded faithfully as the anointed of the Lord. Of his bosom friend, Jonathan, he asked, "What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? * * Truly, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.

"Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee.

"And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even."^a

The new moon in those days was celebrated by special sacrifices, and by the blowing of trumpets. It was kept with great solemnity as a day of gladness, and the celebration lasted about three days,

^aI Samuel 20:1-5.

during which time the king was attended by his chief officers.

Saul Angry with Jonathan. David sought to evade the king. He had reason to fear for his life, yet Jonathan he could trust. Saul was now fully aware, since his son Jonathan had pleaded for David, that his son was the latter's faithful friend, willing to protect him. This naturally made the father angry, whereupon he upbraided Jonathan:

"Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness? * * *

"And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done?

"And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David."^b

Jonathan would be a dutiful son and a loving friend at the same time. It was a most difficult role for him to play. It was hard because of his father's extreme violence. There is through all the episodes between Saul and David a very striking difference. Saul was impatient, petulant, and violent; David was possessed of a spirit of calmness and patience. The experience of David with Saul is one of the sublimest illustrations of the power of patience found anywhere in Holy Writ. There are few qualities in life that do so much to promote the well-

^bI Samuel 20:30-33.

being of man, and above all, to protect man against himself, as the quality of patience. In a man's own soul there is generally found the most violent agitations, the greatest misgivings; indeed it is the storm center of all that affects most unfavorably the peace, the happiness, and the serenity of man. Against these turbulent and unhappy conditions patience is man's greatest consolation.

Jonathan indicated to David by means of his bow and arrow whether Saul was still bent upon David's destruction. After David had been warned, he arose out of his place of concealment, "and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded."^c

Not to enjoy the favor of his king was indeed a great affliction to David. Through it all, however, he was devoted. The beauty of David's character shines forth in the hours of his adversity. Without it the best, the sweetest qualities of his life as a king of Israel would have been hidden from us (Note 1).

David's Escape. David saw that he must make his escape, so he came to a place called Nob. Ahimelech was officiating in the tabernacle, which had already been removed from Shiloh. Here David obtained from the priest even the shew bread to appease his hunger. Ahimelech, however, was in no sense a party to the protection of David, about whose danger and escape he was not informed. This fact, however, did not prevent Saul from destroy-

^cI Samuel 20:41.

ing the priest and all his family. The accusation which Saul brought against the priest was that David, through the latter, sought the word of God. This was a privilege since the days of Moses accorded only to the chief ruler. The fact that Ahimelech was innocent did not save him from Saul's anger.

David now flew into the country of the Philistines, and threw himself upon the mercy of Achish, the king of Gath, whose giant he had killed in a duel, and whose sword he had taken with him from the tabernacle. From Achish David fled to the southern part of Palestine, and hid himself in one of the numerous caves, Adullam. It was in this retreat that, "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them; and there were with him about four hundred men"^d (Note 2).

From Adullam David went over across the Jordan up into the hilly country of Moab to Mizpeh, where he placed himself under the direction of the prophet Gad. However, the people on the western side of the Holy Land began their raids upon the Israelites. David, through the command of Gad, went to relieve the people of Keilah, and when they were delivered, David went to inquire of the Lord whether, after all, the people would deliver him into the hands of Saul. "And the Lord said: They will deliver thee up."

^dI Samuel 22:2.

Thence David must make again his escape. This time he went to the wilderness of Ziph, a place judged to be about three miles south of Hebron. During all this David was not forgotten by his faithful friend:

“And Jonathan Saul’s son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.

“And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth.”^e

It does not appear at this time just how this information was brought to Jonathan. David, in his confidence to his devoted friend, may have revealed to him the fact of his anointing, or it may have come to him through the voice of the Spirit of God.

David Pursued by Saul. Saul, however, pursued David into the wilderness of Ziph; but while in pursuit of David, word came that the Philistines were over-running the country, and he was obliged to return from his pursuit of David. David now had an opportunity to escape to one of the most secluded parts of the country. He betook himself to En-gedi; about two hundred yards west of the Dead Sea, at about the center of its western shore. This place is reached by a very difficult pass, which can be descended only with considerable risk. All the country there today is indented with caverns. In recent years the place has been a favorite resort of

^eI Samuel 23:16, 17.

monks, who sometimes lay for days in these dark caverns. Into one of these caves of En-gedi, David escaped; but Saul also made his way there, and went into the very cave where David was.

“And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe privily.

“And it came to pass afterward, that David’s heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul’s skirt.

“And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.

“So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.”^f

David followed, implored his king, and bowed with his face to the earth before him.

“And David said unto Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men’s words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?”^g

David pleaded with his king, who was now touched by the tenderness and devotion of David. He asked “Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept.

“And he said to David, Thou art more righteous

^fI Samuel 24:4-7.

^gI Samuel 24:9.

than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.”^h

Saul knew that David would yet be king, and he said unto him:

“Swear now therefore unto me by the Lord, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father’s house.”ⁱ

David granted this solemn request. But Saul, like many another man, was the maker neither of his good nor bad fortune. In his evil days he was not himself. He was tormented by an evil spirit, to whose power he had surrendered himself by his own rebellious, wicked life, and every evil act only added to the power which the evil one had over him.

Samuel’s Death. We now come to a solemn event in the life of Israel. It was the death of Samuel. “For twelve years,” Josephus tells us, “he had ruled alone over Israel, and for eighteen years he had ruled with Saul.” The people mourned for Samuel. He was a man of great righteousness, gentle in his nature, and always obedient to the voice of God. As was the case with his predecessor, Eli, however, his sons dishonored him. Samuel may have had some restraining influence over Saul, which, however, does not appear to be the case. At any rate the king pursued David in the same hostile way.

David escaped to Maon. Maon was on the bor-

^hI Samuel 24:17.

ⁱI Samuel 24:21.

der of the wilderness. Here David came in contact with Nabal, a wealthy man whose sheep and cattle and property David and his men were scrupulous to protect. But when David sent out ten of his young men to seek help from him, the latter sent them away contemptuously without help. This angered David, and he gathered his men with the intent of destroying all the males of the house of Nabal.

Abigail. Nabal, it seems, had a most excellent wife, whose cherished name in Scripture is Abigail. When she learned from one of the servants what her husband had done, she immediately prepared dressed sheep, bread and wine, and started out to meet David. She apologized for the conduct of her husband.

“Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send.”^j

She turned David from his rash intent. Soon after, her husband, who was drunken at one of the feasts, became the victim of his own excesses:

“But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.

^jI Samuel 25:25.

“And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died.”^k

This circumstance led a little later on to the marriage of Abigail to David.

“David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel; and they were also both of them his wives.

“But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim.”^l

David was therefore deprived of his first wife through the enmity of his father-in-law, the king.

David escaped to the country south of Palestine, the wilderness of Ziph. Here he was pursued by Saul, who was again delivered into the hands of David while sleeping within a trench with his spear struck in the ground. David, however, was content to remove his spear and the cruse of water that was by him. And he again reminded those who would have him smite the king that Saul was still the Lord’s anointed. Again Saul and David came within speaking distance. The king knew that he had sinned, and said:

“Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.”

“Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.”^m

^kI Samuel 25:37, 38.

^lI Samuel 25:43, 44.

^mI Samuel 26:21, 25.

Saul knew, but his knowledge did not save him. He had lost his only refuge of safety,—the Spirit of God. Nor was his loss of that spirit his only misfortune: an evil spirit took its place; it was a double affliction.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what way did Jonathan act to save David from the anger of Saul?
2. Relate the circumstance which led David to eat the shew bread in the tabernacle?
3. In what ways did David escape Saul?
4. Relate the circumstance attending Samuel's death.
5. What part of Palestine was the wilderness in the days of David? Why?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does patience give power?
2. Why does the spirit of revenge unfit man for divine purposes, when adversity becomes necessary for his development?

CHAPTER 4

DAVID A REFUGEE, AND THE DEATH OF SAUL

(I Sam. 27-31)

David and Achish. David lived in constant fear that some day he would perish by the hand of Saul. This great suspense begotten of fear, weighed heavily upon the heart of David. His own people did not protect him. He therefore with his men went to the Philistines, and dwelt with king Achish, of Gath, who set aside for David and his men the city of Ziklag. The time he passed in this country was a year and four months. During that time he went to war with the people in the south, the Geshurites, and the Amalekites, who lived in the wilderness of Shur, which extended along the Mediterranean to the land of Egypt. He smote the land, we are told, "and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish."^a

It appears from what passed between David and Achish, that these two lived in friendly relations. However, there could be between the Israelitish king and this king of the Philistines no permanent alliance. David sought refuge where conditions seemed to him most favorable for his safety. As time went on, however, the Philistines became more

^aI Samuel 27:9.

aggressive. They pushed their way northward and invaded the beautiful valley of Jezreel which lies on the border line between Galilee and Samaria, and extends east to Mount Gilboa which overlooks the valley of the Jordan eastward. Saul was now in great distress. He needed the Lord and sought Him, but "the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets."

Witch of En-dor. The Urim and Thummim were the stones through which the prophet looked to discover the word of God and things to come. Saul had known in his better days something of the spirit of revelation and the divine favor of the prophets.

"Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-dor."^b

Saul went in disguise to see her, for he had driven witches and those with familiar spirits out of the land, and the woman of En-dor would naturally protect herself after the unfortunate experience of those of her class. The story of the witch of En-dor is so often referred to, and so violently discussed by some that I give it in the words of the Scripture at some length:

"Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel.

"And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul,

^bI Samuel 28:7.

saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul.

“And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth.

“And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.

“And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams; therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.

“Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?

“Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.”^c

This was a fatal message to Saul. The evil spirits answered Christ in His day. Those spirits had knowledge and spoke some truth. But how should a witch have the power to call up a prophet? Did she call him up, or was she the victim of some false

^c† Samuel 28:11-16, 19.

spirit that imitated Samuel? Many questions arise out of this peculiar circumstance. As a rule they are not questions vital to our needed knowledge of God or to the manner of our worship. We know that God has disapproved witchcraft in whatever form it appears. We know that He has made prophets the mediums of communications. "Surely the Lord doeth nothing save as he reveals his mind and will to his servants the prophets." As the Philistines gathered in the valley of Jezreel, Saul went out to meet them.

Achish Refuses David's Help. At this peculiar place a somewhat curious incident occurred. Achish had brought David and his six hundred men along with him, as if David might contend as an ally of the Philistines against his brethren the Israelites. The princes of the Philistines objected to David's presence, but Achish defended David. He was compelled to yield to these princes, who said, "Make this fellow return that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men?"

"Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another, in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands? * * *

"And David said unto Achish, But what have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been with thee unto this day, that I

may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the king?

“And Achish answered and said to David, I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God: notwithstanding, the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle.”^d

So David and his men returned across the country to Ziklag, a journey of about two or three days. One is likely here to conclude that there was really some deception in David's words to Achish. David had been anointed king. He knew the Israelites were God's people; he knew that God had commanded the utter destruction of all the Canaanitish people of the Promised Land. How could he then fight against the Israelites? It will be noticed here that the narrative in no way justifies the practice of deception.

It may here be said in passing that this sort of deception, as in matters of trade, is a universal practice among the Orientals in all the country round about where David lived. They do not let their yeas be “yea” and their nays “nay” as Christ commanded them. Surely our Lord knew what He was saying when he warned them against the practice of deception, or saying not only more than they needed to say, but also more than they meant. It is a disposition to make themselves agreeable to others by exaggeration. One cannot believe that David ever had a thought of fighting on the side of the Philistines against the Israelites.

^dI Samuel 29:4-9.

David Recovers the Spoil. However, he returned to Ziklag, where he found the city had been destroyed by fire, and the women and children and livestock carried away. David naturally went in hot pursuit.

“And David’s two wives were taken captives. Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. * * *

“And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech’s son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David.

“And David inquired at the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.”^e

They made rapid and long marches in a southerly direction. At the brook Bezor David was obliged to leave two hundred of his men. On the way they discovered in the field an Egyptian servant of the king of the Amalekites, who had destroyed Ziklag. From him David learned what had been done and set out with his four hundred companions to recover what had been carried away. He recovered all.

“And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them: David recovered all.”^f

However, those who had been in the contest did

^eI Samuel 30:5-8.

^fI Samuel 30:19.

not care to share with the two hundred who had taken no part in the fight. David however reproved them.

“Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand.”^g

So David divided the spoils of those who stayed to take care of the stuff with those who went down to do battle. Here is a peculiar circumstance which well illustrates what may happen to people in our own day. Those who have obtained position and title to worldly goods claim them as a matter of right, and rest on their legal titles.

There is always, however, this almost universally unanswered question: “What part hath God taken when we are made stewards of the property to which we claim right and title?” David said that because God had helped them into the possession of what they had recaptured, those who had been helped by the Lord must divide with those who were left behind. The selfish four hundred would have taken all.

As conquerors the argument was on their side, and above all, they were selfish enough to enforce at the expense of their brethren the old adage: “Possession is nine points of the law.” That same question has been coming up from the days of David down to the present time. It made trouble then; it is making trouble now. However, the cir-

^gI Samuel 30:23.

cumstance contains a warning that men would do well to heed, not to provoke divine displeasure.

Death of Saul and Jonathan. While these things were going on in the southern part of the Promised Land, in the north and around Gilboa which overlooks the river Jordan and the valley below, there was going on a decisive battle in the history of ancient Israel. Saul and his sons were defeated.

“And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchi-shua, Saul’s sons. * * *

“Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.

“And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him.”^h

One is led to exclaim, Alas for the brave and true-hearted Jonathan! Was the sin of his father visited upon the son? They had perished together. We cannot withhold the regret that Jonathan did not live to enjoy the fruits of a friendship so strong, so true between him and David. In the fullness of their confidence and friendship, Jonathan died. How he and David would have withstood the temptations and trials that might still have come to them in later years we are unable to say. We can only

^hI Samuel 31:2-5.

see as man seeth. But God knows all things,—the end from the beginning. At any rate there is nothing to disturb the admiration we feel for that sweet friendship of which poets and prophets have sung.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What were the relations between David and the Philistines?
2. What was the Urim and Thummim?
3. What relieved David from any duty he might think he was under to fight with the Philistines against the Israelites?
4. What was the use prescribed for the ephod?
5. What are the lessons taught in the division of the spoil taken from the Amalekites?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are your views about the experience of Saul with the witch of En-dor?
2. When does passiveness become a duty in the conduct of man?

NOTES

1. It is good for us that we sometimes have sorrows and adversities, for they often make a man lay to heart that he is only a stranger and sojourner, and may not put his trust in any worldly thing. It is good that we sometimes endure contradictions, and are hardly and unfairly judged, when we do and mean what is good. For these things help us to be humble, and shield us from vain-glory. For then we seek the more earnestly the witness of God, when men speak evil of us falsely, and give us no credit for good.

2. Make no great account who is for thee or against thee, but mind only the present duty and take care that God be with thee in whatsoever thou doest. Have a good conscience and God will defend thee, for he whom God will help no man's perverseness shall be able to hurt. If thou knowest how to hold thy peace and to suffer, without doubt thou shalt see the help of the Lord. He knoweth the time and the way to deliver thee, therefore must thou resign thyself to Him. To God it belongeth to help and to deliver from all confusion. Oftentimes it is very profitable for keeping us in greater humility, that others know and rebuke our faults.

CHAPTER 5

DAVID, THE KING OF ISRAEL

(II Sam. 1-10)

Crime and punishment grow out of one stem.—
Emerson.

The Second Book of Samuel continues the life of David from the death of Saul. It is sometimes called the Second Book of Kings. There is no real reason why Samuel should have been divided into two books, as the second is a mere continuation of the first.

According to the account given in the first Book of Samuel, Saul killed himself by falling upon his own sword. The second book opens with the delivery to David at Ziklag, in the country of the Philistines, of a message from an Amalekite, who also brought Saul's crown and bracelet, and who informed David that he (the Amalekite) had taken the life of the king.

David did not welcome the news of Saul's death. Saul had been anointed by the Lord, and that fact David had repeated again and again. As one anointed of the Lord, David considered Saul entirely subject to the decrees of Jehovah. The Lord appointed Saul, and it was His business to remove him in His own due time. So he mourned and wept for Saul, and to the young Amalekite he said:

‘How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?’^a

The rash deed cost the young Amalekite his life. To David the message was the more sorrowful because it also contained the death of his friend Jonathan. In his lamentations he exclaims:

“The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!

“Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

“Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. * * *

“Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

“Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights; who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.

“How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.

“I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.”^b

^aI Samuel 1:14.

^bI Samuel 1:19-21, 23-26.

David's life was singularly free from resentment towards those whom he esteemed as favored of the Lord, even though they sought his own life.

The First Kingship. The Lord now commanded David to go up to Hebron. Here men of Judah came and anointed him king over the house of Judah. David moved slowly in advancing his claims as king over all Israel. God had made him what he was, and God would make him all that he was intended to be. He did not care to assume any authority to which he had not been advanced by divine command.

It was quite natural that those who were the sons of Saul would consider themselves entitled to the inheritance of the kingdom. Saul's sons, however, all perished in battle with the exception of Ishbosheth, who made himself king over the people in Gilead, and later over all the other tribes except Judah, who had followed David. This son was at the time he began to reign over Israel forty years old, and he reigned for two years.

The fact that there were now two kings in Israel led naturally to civil war. The Bible says:

“Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.”^c

There were two strong characters at this period, warriors who represented the two factions; one was Abner, who took the part of Saul's son; the other

^cII Samuel 3:1.

was Joab, a mighty warrior of David. Abner, however, and Saul's son fell into a dispute from the fact that Abner married one of the wives of Saul. This led Abner to seek an alliance with David, to whom he sent messengers. David, however, could not forget his wife Michal, whom Saul had given to him in his youth as a reward for an act of bravery. When, however, David fell into disfavor with Saul he took his daughter Michal away from him and gave her to another.

David now demanded as an evidence of good faith on the part of Abner that Abner return to him his wife Michal, and as she was led from the north southward to Hebron, she was followed by her husband, Phaltiel, who wept over his misfortune. Abner, however, would not find any special welcome with Joab, whose brother Asahel Abner had killed in one of their former wars, and Joab therefore took the first opportunity to encompass the death of Abner. This was another source of sorrow to David, who followed his bier and mourned his death.

“And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?”^d

Such was the testimony of David to the memory of Abner.

When the chief general of Ish-bosheth betrayed his king, it was quite natural that others would conspire to dethrone him. Finally he was slain by

^dII Samuel 3:38.

Rechab and Baanah while lying upon his bed during the heat of the day. They brought his head to David in Hebron. If they thereby expected to gain the favor of David in his rise to power, they were mistaken.

“How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?”^e

They paid the penalty of their treachery.

David Again Anointed King. This circumstance, however, brought the elders of Israel together at Hebron in the southern part of Judah, where they again anointed David king over all Israel.

“David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years.

“In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah.

“And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither.”^f

David now went up with his men to Jerusalem from Hebron, where he took the city from the Jebusites, and laid the foundation of the most famous city the world has ever known.

By this time David had won the consideration,

^eII Samuel 4:11.

^fII Samuel 5:4-6.

if not the friendship of some of the stronger tribes around him. Hiram, king of Tyre, sent to David cedar trees, no doubt from the Lebanons, and also carpenters and mechanics that they might build him a house. This circumstance, however, brought to David's mind the fact that it was not consistent with humble dignity to build a house of cedar for himself while the ark of God rested in a tent. David therefore appealed to the prophet Nathan, who at this time enjoyed the prophetic office, proposing to build a house to the Lord.

The idea at first appealed to Nathan favorably, but the Lord appeared to him in the night and commanded him to go to David and let him know that the building of a house to the glory of God was not a part of his mission in life. David was a warrior. But God promised that such a high privilege should be granted to David's house. So the erection of the temple at Jerusalem was left to David's son, Solomon. David, however, was not disappointed. He was still grateful, and praised God that the honor of such an opportunity should come to his house.

The Ark Removed to Jerusalem. When the Philistines met repeated calamities by the presence of the ark in their leading cities, they returned it to the Israelites, who deposited it at Kirjath-Jearim, where it remained thereafter. David had selected the city of the Jebusites as the capital of his new kingdom. There he set up the tabernacle, and there the ark of God should be placed within it. A new

cart was made to bring it from the house of Abinadab in Gibeah.

“And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.

“And when they came to Nachon’s threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it.

“And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.”^g

Whatever punishment Uzzah may have required for transgressing both the law and the will of God, the circumstance aroused, naturally, throughout Israel a spirit of fear for God and reverence for the ark. David was also afraid because of what had happened, and carried the ark aside into the house of Obed-edom, where it rested for three months. During this time Obed-edom was blessed in all his affairs, because of the presence of the sacred ark. Finally, David removed it to the tabernacle on Mount Zion, one of the sacred precincts of what was now to become the holy city of Jerusalem.

David’s first wife did not appreciate the conduct of her husband in dancing before the ark as it moved by her house. “She despised him in her heart.”

“And David said unto Michal, It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before

^gII Samuel 6:5-7.

all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord."

"Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death."^h

His wife paid the penalty for the contempt with which she looked upon her husband, who in her mind was celebrating in too humble a manner the arrival of the ark at Jerusalem.

The Wars of David. The wars of David cover a considerable period in the history of this king. In these wars we have a repetition of the divine favor which made Israel successful in their contentions against the people of the Philistines to the west of them and against the Moabites beyond the Jordan to the east of them. It is said that David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus, showing that he extended his conquest away beyond the limits of the Promised Land as Palestine was subsequently known. The days of successful wars are days of a king's glory.

"And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting of the Syrians in the valley of salt, being eighteen thousand men. * * *

"And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people."ⁱ

He made his sons chief rulers and began the establishment of a royal household that in days to come became a source of sorrow to him.

^hII Samuel 6:21, 23.

ⁱII Samuel 8:13-15.

“And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake? (Note 2).

“And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.

“And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar.”^j

This son, Mephibosheth, David took into his house and provided with means of support and restored to him the land of his grandfather, Saul.

David cherished other friendships. He had not forgotten when he was a refugee the kindness of Nahash, king of the Ammonites. When Nahash died David sent messengers to his son Hanun to comfort him and to extend to him words of kindness. The son, however, became suspicious. He took David’s servants, shaved off one half of their beards and cut their garments off in the middle, an act of greatest insult and degradation to an Oriental. In their humiliation, David granted them the privilege of remaining at the Jordan until their beards should grow again.

The children of Ammon now prepared for war and were met by the hosts of David under the leadership of Joab.

“And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew the men of seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote

^jII Samuel 9:1-4.

Shobach the captain of their host, who died there."^k

From this time on the Syrians were afraid to help the children of Ammon any more. These were the wars beyond the Jordan.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did David receive the news of Saul's death?
2. Explain the rivalry for the kingdom which Saul's death created.
3. What was the history of Jerusalem up to the time of David?
4. What was the sin of Uzzah?
5. What were the relations of David and Nahash?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the boundaries of Palestine under the rule of David?
2. What was David's conception of Saul as the anointed of the Lord?

NOTES

1. My Lord Cardinal, there is one fact which you seem to have forgotten. God is a sure paymaster. He may not pay at the end of every week or month or year; but I charge you, remember that he pays in the end.
2. The generous who is always just, and the just who is always generous, may, unannounced, approach the throne of heaven.

^kII Samuel 10-18.

CHAPTER 6

TROUBLES BECLOUD THE REIGN OF DAVID

(II Sam. 11-24)

How oft the sight of means to do all deeds makes deeds ill done.—Shakespeare.

Triumphs, glory, and success often crown the lives of nations and individuals as the companions of temptations, sorrows, misfortunes, and sometimes degradations. David would not have been human had he not felt some exultations of selfish pride as he beheld the kingdom of Israel spreading beyond the confines of all former conquests. As his own glory enveloped him day by day, it would be strange indeed if the glory of God did not sometimes fade before him. David never fully forgot his God as Saul before him had done. Saul might mourn his punishment, but David mourned his sins. For the latter, repentance holds out some hope, gives some assurance.

It is remarkable how the Bible reveals to us the sins of men, often in revolting details. In those days the sins of men's hearts were not very far removed from their conduct. Their social lives and their surroundings did not bring a very great compelling pressure upon them. Through it all, however, the requirements of the law of Moses were binding and severe, and God's standard of judgment was never more exalted than in those primitive

times. We may wonder that the people did not do better, but sometimes we are compelled to wonder that they did not do worse.

King David Sins. David was a great character. He was anointed king, as a man after God's own heart. Some of his sins were no doubt grievous, but his repentance was as sorrowful as his sins had been glaring. He no sooner reached the pinnacle of his fame than the severest of his temptations overtook him. Uriah, a Hittite, had a beautiful wife. In the means David adopted to secure her, he truly sinned, but he also sinned by marrying into a forbidden nation. She was a beautiful woman. It was the old, old story,—the god-like attribute of love turned from sacred channels into sin (Note 1).

David had Uriah placed in the front ranks before the walls in the siege of the city, where his life was taken. He not only sinned in bringing about the death of Uriah, but he sinned while Uriah was yet living. The child of his sin died. But later, Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, bore David an illustrious son, whom God honored, and whose glory and wisdom have drawn upon him the admiration of the world. The wisdom of Solomon from his day to this has been considered the very acme of all wisdom.

For such a sin as David committed God did not permit him to escape retribution. In those days Nathan was the prophet of the Lord. The story of Nathan's rebuke to David is so poetic, so touching, so historical in unnumbered quotations, that it is given here in full:

“And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

“The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

“But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

“And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

“And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:

“And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.

“And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

“And I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

“Wherefore hast thou despised the command-

ment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

“Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.

“Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor.”^a

David mourned his sin (Note 2),—not merely his punishment. He exclaimed, “I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.”^b

David had pronounced his own judgment upon his own head; but God did not require the fulfillment of that judgment. There was yet more for David to do in the fulfillment of God’s purposes. It is remarkable that Solomon, the fruit of this sinful marriage, should come to fill Jerusalem with the glory of God’s temple, and to fill the world with the glory of his wisdom. What is yet more striking is the wonderful inspiration that has come to the world through the Psalms of David. In those psalms, which sing the praises of God, there is a sublime spirit of repentance. There is in them a

^aII Samuel 12:1-11, 13.

^bII Samuel 12:13.

spirit of mourning and the answering spirit of comfort. Sometimes we are almost led to ask if David could have written those beautiful Psalms had he not been constantly yearning for divine glory.

David came down to the level of a sinful man, and he had attuned the heart of the sinner in quest of his God's forgiveness to the great hope that God's mercies are ample to cover all the sins of man save those for which there is no forgiveness. David's appeal to divine mercy put aside the self-righteous, and made him a companion to the man in sin, who in the true spirit of repentance is struggling to regain divine favor.

Absalom. The next trouble to vex David was the revolt of his son Absalom, whose beautiful sister Tamar, one of her brothers, Amnon loved. His violation of the law of Moses with respect to his sister led Absalom to kill Amnon. Thereupon Absalom made his escape to the home of his grandmother across the river Jordan in Geshur, where he remained in exile during a period of three years. Through the intrigue and influence of David's chief general, Joab, Absalom was recalled, not through David's wish, nor yet by the command of God. David though permitting Absalom to return to Jerusalem was not disposed to meet him, and it was some time before Absalom received any consideration from his father. No sooner, however, had Absalom re-established himself in Jerusalem than he began his intrigue against his father. He was popular with the people, attractive, winsome,

and withal perhaps what we should now call a demagogue.

“And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him.

“And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.”^c

Absalom soon obtained a following, and gathered those who were intriguing with him to Hebron south of Jerusalem about twenty-five miles. Absalom was born at Hebron, and there David had his early reign over the house of Judah. The place was therefore suitable for Absalom's purpose. From his headquarters in the south he sent spies throughout Israel and created a revolt against the rule of David.

The king was in no disposition to oppose Absalom, and with some of his followers he left Jerusalem and fled towards the river Jordan, at first taking with him the ark; but after further consideration, David decided to return the ark to its resting place in the tabernacle on Mount Zion.

Absalom had therefore no difficulty in making his entry into Jerusalem. The character of the man was shown by the fact that he violated the honor of his father's house with ten of David's wives or concubines who were left behind when the king fled out of the city. Such an act was the greatest offense that could be committed against any person,

^cII Samuel 15:5, 6.

and of course would naturally make any reconciliation impossible between the father and the son. It may be here too that David was compelled to taste some of the bitterness which he had caused others, and especially in the case of Uriah and his wife Bathsheba.

There was nothing in the character of Absalom, except his beauty and his winning ways, that commended him to the people, and he proved unworthy before the Lord. Absalom now starts out with an army of Israelites against his father, who was located in Geshur beyond the Jordan. Here a battle took place, and while Absalom was riding beneath the trees at a place near the wood of Ephraim, his long flowing hair caught in the boughs of the trees, and he was so suspended that his animal passed on from under him. Through Joab, Absalom was put to death.

David Mourns for Absalom. This wily general realized that there could be no peace for David and his kingdom so long as this unworthy son remained at large, and though David had pleaded that the life of his son be spared, Joab was in no mood to grant the king his request, inasmuch as he looked upon David's love for Absalom as the weakness of a father for an unworthy son. David, however, was inconsolable, and burst out in the loving exclamations of his poetical and musical nature in one of those rhapsodies which so frequently characterize his words:

“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!

would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"^d

Joab was in no mood to humor the king in his inconsolable grief over Absalom, and he therefore appears before David with words of rebuke:

"Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines;

"In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well."^e

Such words roused David from his selfish grief to a higher consideration of the duties which he owed to those who had fought his battles and won his deliverance.

The Revolt of Sheba. The troubles of David were not yet ended. One revolt but gave encouragement for others, and so Sheba, a Benjamite, undertook the overthrow of the house of David. The people of Judah, however, were again loyal to their king, and Joab found himself again at war for David, and Sheba betook himself to a walled city called Abel where he was besieged by Joab and his army. It was here the wise woman came to the wall, and looking down upon Joab said:

^dII Samuel 18:33.

^eII Samuel 19:5, 6.

“Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear.

“Then he spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old times, saying, They shall surely ask counsel at Abel: and so they ended the matter.”^f

Abel was one of those cities noted for the wisdom of its people. Joab, however, demanded as a condition of refraining from taking the city, that the wise woman send to him the head of Sheba, and it was done. This ended the revolt.

David’s conquest of the Philistines and the Ammonites and the Syrians, the tribes round about Israel, was naturally a source both of gratitude and pride. It is always safer to encourage feelings of gratitude than feelings of pride; gratitude carries us back to God; pride lifts us in the conceit of our own wisdom and ways. In the moment of David’s gratitude his praises to Jehovah are sung in those psalms which contain the wisdom and the inspiration that have been a light to the world. In his last days, “David spake unto the Lord the words of this song, in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul.”^g

The same psalm is contained in the eighteenth chapter of Psalms. There are many beautiful passages, only one or two of which space will permit to be inserted here:

“I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity.

^fII Samuel 20:17, 18.

^gII Samuel 22:1.

“Therefore the Lord hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in his eyesight. * * *

“As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him.”^h

The twenty-fourth verse of this psalm has a special significance for all God’s children. David says, “I have kept myself from mine iniquity.” Our own iniquities,—think of them! They tempt us; they try us; they have power to destroy us. It is so easy to think of the iniquities of others and so hard to think of our own that we perish rather by our own hand than fall by the sword of the enemy.

David Numbers Israel and Judah. How beautifully expressed is the gratitude of David; how wrongfully expressed was his pride. When the anger of God was kindled against him because of the pride of his heart and in the flush of his victories, he numbered Israel and Judah, even though his old general, Joab, gave him a most solemn warning:

“Now the Lord thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, a hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it; but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?”ⁱ

The king was not restrained. And then came to him and the people who shared his pride one of the greatest sorrowings of David’s life, after they were

^hII Samuel 22:24, 25, 31.

ⁱII Samuel 24:3.

numbered, 800,000 men in the tribes of Israel, 500,000 men of the tribe of Judah. The enumeration of the tribes separated Judah from the rest of Israel, as if foretelling the division of the kingdom. David's heart smote him:

"I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly (Note 3).

"For when David was up in the morning, the word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,

"Go and say unto David, Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.

"So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me.

"And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait; let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man.

"So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed; and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men.

"And when the angel stretched out his hand upon

Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the Lord was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite.

“And David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father’s house.

“And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite.”^j

The threshing floor where David built an altar was subsequently the site of the temple which Solomon built. This was one of the greatest plagues in Israel,—the greatest of all up to that time. When Sennacherib suffered a plague in his army it carried off 185,000 men in one night. It is related in history that when the army of the Carthaginians were at Syracuse a plague carried off 100,000 men.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Narrate the story of David’s sin against Uriah.
2. How did Nathan bring home to David his sin?
3. What is the story of Absalom?
4. Describe the history and character of Joab.
5. Why was pestilence wrought upon the people?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the dangers of personal popularity?
2. Give a character sketch of Joab.

^jII Samuel 24:10-18.

NOTES

1. He who has no mind to trade with the devil should be so wise as to keep from his trap.—South.

2. A Jewish Rabbi exhorted his disciples to repent the day before they died. One replied that the day of a man's death was uncertain. "Repent, therefore, every day," said the Rabbi, "and you will be sure to repent the day before you die."

3. "It was prettily devised of Aesop, the fly sat upon the axletree of the chariot wheel, and said, 'What a dust do I raise!?' So are there some vain persons that, whatever goeth alone, or moveth upon greater means, if they have never so little hand in it they think it is they that carry it."—Bacon.

CHAPTER 7

SOLOMON MADE KING

(I Kings 1-5)

Wisdom lies only in truth.—Goethe.

When David was upon his death-bed, his son Adonijah, the son of Haggith, was so possessed by ambition that he conspired to be the successor of his father David. Adonijah conferred with Joab, the great general of David, and also with Abiathar, the priest, both of whom were self-seeking in offering their help to the new pretender to the throne. Adonijah was the full brother of Absalom, “a very goodly man” the Bible says, and he no doubt had the same persuasiveness that his brother possessed. However, there was one who had not been consulted,—the man who represented the authority of God,—Nathan the prophet, who immediately spoke to Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, saying:

“Go and get thee in unto king David, and say unto him, Didst not thou, my lord, O king, swear unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? why then doth Adonijah reign?”^a

Solomon Anointed King. All that Adonijah had done had been without the knowledge of his father. At the same time Bathsheba approached the king, Nathan also came to him. David thereupon called

^aI Kings 1:13.

the priest Zadok and Nathan the prophet, and had them take Solomon, his son, down into the valley of Gihon, and Zadok there anointed him king over Israel. This Gihon is undoubtedly the Tyropoeum valley, a valley that separated Jerusalem into eastern and western parts. It ran from the north side of the city in a southerly direction, down into the Kedron. On the east side of the valley in ancient times the hill was called Zion. It was the temple hill, in later times called Mount Moriah. The western and southern part of the city was in later times called Zion.

The command of David was that Solomon should ride on the king's own mule. This was a sign of royalty. The Jews, in their early writings, say that it was a sin punishable by death to ride on the king's mule without his permission. Christ, when He gave the people of Jerusalem an opportunity to receive Him as their king, rode into the city on a mule. When Adonijah discovered that Solomon had been appointed king by his father, and anointed by Zadok and Nathan the prophet, he immediately surrendered his claims to his younger brother, professed allegiance to him and asked that he be not put to death. Adonijah, in his fear had gone to the temple and seized hold of the horns of the altar. Solomon assured him, however, that not a hair of his head should fall if he proved himself worthy, but that if wickedness was found in him he must die.

It was not long, however, before Adonijah was

caught in a conspiracy. When David was old and on his death-bed there was a young woman selected, to cherish and warm him, whose name was Abishag, the Shunammite. It was a practice then and later among Oriental nations that whoever dwelt within the precincts of the king became a part of his possessions, so that Abishag really belonged to the household of David. As Saul's household came to David, so likewise would the household of David be the inheritance of Solomon.

The intrigues of women have more than once led to the overthrow of a kingdom, and the king, upon his succession in a land where polygamy was practiced retained the women still in his possession and within his influence, and he might make of them his wives if they were not forbidden by the terms of the law of Moses.

Adonijah now came to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and sought her influence to make Abishag his wife. The matter seemed innocent enough to Bathsheba. Women are sometimes interested in love matches, and she no doubt had her pride gratified by the request that she exercise her influence with her son Solomon. She now appeared before the king and was seated at his right side, a place of distinction and one accorded in those days in Israel as well as other Oriental countries to the very powerful personage known as the king's mother. Solomon, however, was not deceived by this intrigue.

“And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunam-

mite for Adonijah? ask for him the kingdom also; for he is mine elder brother; even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah.”^b

Death of Adonijah. By this conspiracy, Adonijah forfeited his life. To the other conspirator, Abiathar, the king said:

“Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted.”^c

Joab, the chief general of David, fled to the tabernacle and laid hold on the horns of the altar. Joab craved death at the altar rather than appear before the king. So Solomon granted his request. Joab, though an old man, had been guilty of cruel and murderous conduct which had brought disfavor upon David and upon his house. Let the blood of those whom he had unjustly slain, said the king, return upon the head of Joab and upon the head of his seed forever.

Solomon had now made himself safe against intrigues in Israel. He was firmly established upon his throne, and began his kingly career in the glory that afterward made his name famous not only throughout Israel, but by its grandeur, throughout the world.

^bI Kings 2:22.

^cI Kings 2:26.

The nation that would most naturally and easily be brought into contact with Israel was Egypt which was separated on the southwest by only a comparatively short distance. Solomon married one of the daughters of Pharaoh. Whether in this marriage there was any thought of maintaining a royalty by intermarriage as is done in our own day, we are not informed.

Solomon encouraged the worship of God by sacrifices upon altars in the so-called high places. These high places had been forbidden because the heathen nations had used them for their own idolatrous purposes. Then again there was one place given for the offer of sacrifices, and that was at the door of the tabernacle.

We are not told that Solomon was forbidden to offer sacrifices elsewhere, but we do know that it helped the separation of ancient Israel when they were divided into two separate kingdoms. The central place of worship, at the door of the tabernacle, wherever that was, would naturally have a strong tendency to keep the people of God united as a nation.

Solomon Promised Wisdom. There comes now into Solomon's life a beautiful lesson which has been told and retold for thousands of years,—the story of Solomon's wisdom:

“In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

“And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy

servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

“And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

“And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

“Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

“And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

“And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

“Behold, I have done according to thy word: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

“And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honor; so that there

shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.”^d

Soon thereafter is recorded the fact that there came to Solomon two women both claiming the same child, which one had obtained by placing her dead child at the side of her who had a living child which the mother of the dead child removed by stealth. From their contrary statements Solomon did not judge them, even though the spirit of the Lord may have enabled him to do so. As a judge it was his duty to act upon the testimony. Therefore he proposed to divide the child in two by the sword. The real mother, whose heart went out to her offspring, preferred that the child be not killed, even though the one who was not its mother kept it. This expression of the mother's heart was evidence to Solomon, who the mother was, inasmuch as the one who had stolen the child was willing that it should be thus divided.

The Size of the Kingdom. “And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life.

“And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal.

“Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and a hundred sheep, besides harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl.”^e

^dI Kings 3:5-13.

^eI Kings 4:21-23,

The exact amount here given cannot be calculated in terms of English weights. It has been estimated by those who have undertaken the computation that Solomon fed daily at the royal table something like 14,000 persons. It is also said in ancient history that the kings of Persia during their supremacy fed 15,000 daily at the board of the king.

“And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon.

“And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. * * *

“And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore.

“And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. * * *

“And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.

“And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.

“And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.”^f

Evidently most of Solomon’s proverbs have been

^f1 Kings 4:25-34.

lost to us. The Book of Proverbs has perhaps less than a thousand. Even if Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon and its proverbs be included, it would add only one or two hundred.

“He spake of trees.” Solomon was something of a naturalist; he evidently possessed great powers of observation. That he wrote on the subjects of plant life or animal life seems hardly likely, as no evidence remains to us to that effect. He was a striking example of Christ’s promise: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.”

The Gift of Wisdom. What does the gift of wisdom to Solomon teach us? Simply that we should ask for what he asked. Solomon wanted that which he needed most, to perform the mission in life which God had assigned him. He was thinking not so much of himself as he was of the great divine requirements which he would have to meet. His desire for wisdom therefore was not simply a selfish desire to advance his fame or his wealth. There is in Solomon’s expressed wish for wisdom a childlike humility.

He knew the greatness of his father, the greatness of the kingdom which David erected, and he said: “I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.” God also gave Solomon “largeness of heart.” His sympathies therefore were great, and there was charity in his judgments. Along with the gifts of God there are usually found corresponding temptations. “Where much is given

much is required." In his great love for God and God's children there were lurking temptations that beset Solomon and proved his weakness, and brought on God's displeasure. However, he was chosen of God—no doubt the best instrumentality of his day in carrying out the will of Jehovah.

Today we look at Solomon from afar. Not only are we removed from him a long way in the matter of our calling and mission in life, but we look at him from the great distance of time. We may judge from the standpoint of God's requirements, but not from our own ability to say what we could or would do under similar circumstances. Few of God's children have ever been put to such a test. We must therefore conclude that the possibilities of Solomon's life were as great as his calling.

We may safely conclude that all in all God loved and blessed Solomon, and God, knowing the great temptations that would beset him, must have felt somewhat towards this prince in Israel as Christ felt towards Peter, even after Peter privately denied his Master. On one occasion Christ said to Peter, "Satan hath sought thee that he might sift thee as chaff." From that we may reasonably conclude that men without divine protection are no match for Satan.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the conspiracy of Adonijah?
2. How was Solomon made king?
3. Why was worship in the high places forbidden?
4. Why was Solomon given wisdom?
5. What were the boundaries of the kingdom of Israel under Solomon?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is wisdom?
2. Why is wisdom not always a safe substitute for divine protection?

NOTES

The Greeks had deified wisdom; as shown by St. Paul's language, "We worship not Minerva, but Christ." It is important to dwell upon this—there is a marvelous idolatry of talent; it is a strange and grievous thing to see how men bow down before genius and success. Draw the distinction sharp between these two things—goodness is one thing, talent another. The Son of Man came not as a scribe, but as a poor working man. He was a Teacher, not a Rabbi. When the idolatry of talent enters the Church, then farewell to spirituality; when men ask their teachers, not for that which will make them more humble and God-like, but for the excitement of an intellectual banquet, then farewell to Christian progress. Here also St. Paul stood firm—not wisdom but Christ crucified. Christianity is not a creed, but a life; and when men who listen to a preacher only find an intellectual amusement, they are not thereby advanced one step nearer to the high life of a Christian.—Robertson.

CHAPTER 8

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

(I Kings 6-8)

Choose well ; your choice is brief and yet endless.
—Goethe.

If David founded what was to be the most celebrated city in the world, it was left to his son Solomon to construct a building which, including those that followed it after its destruction, was to become the most celebrated of all buildings,—the temple of Jerusalem. It became the heart of the Jewish world, and its history has been sacred to millions of Christians who believe in the God of Israel. (Note 1.)

There was a people with whom the Israelites hitherto had little to do. They were located directly west of the northern extremity of the promised land in a country called Phoenicia. Their chief cities were Sidon and Tyre. The Phoenicians had only a small seacoast, and could not therefore engage in the pursuits of agriculture and stock raising. They were artisans and merchants whose ships might be seen in all parts of the Mediterranean.

Building of the Temple Begun. The Israelites, on the other hand, were agriculturists, and prepared to exchange the raw material for the finished products and the timber of the Lebanon, which was

so close to the country of the Phoenicians. Solomon sent this message to king Hiram of Tyre:

“Thou knowest how that David my father could not build a house unto the name of the Lord his God, for the wars which were about him on every side, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet.”^a

Solomon now had peace and was prepared to go ahead with the chief mission of his life—the construction of the temple. So the Sidonians were employed to hew the timbers and transport them to Jerusalem. The Lebanons where the timbers grew were something like one hundred fifty to two hundred miles northeast. The most feasible plan was to haul these timbers from the Lebanons in the north thirty or forty miles to the seacoast of the Mediterranean and then bring them in flats down to a place called Joppa, from which they were taken by a good road across the valley of the Sharon up through the low mountains of Judea to their destination. To carry on this work, “King Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men.

“And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home. * * *

“And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains.”^b

^aI Kings 5:3.

^bI Kings 5:13-15.

This of course was forced labor. It was the first time that the people of Israel had been brought under a species of serfdom, peonage. Here the warning of God was fulfilled wherein He said to Samuel that a king would "take their men servants and their maid-servants and their goodliest young men, and put them to his work." David, in his time, had compelled the strangers that were in Israel to do certain work.

According to the numbers of the people, there were 1,030,000 able-bodied Israelites. Now a levy of 30,000 would be one in every forty men, and one-third of these were constantly at work in the Lebanon. They worked one month and returned home to pursue their own labors two months, and then returned. This in itself perhaps was not so severe a burden, but the people did not like it. They complained, and it was one of the causes that led to a division of the kingdom of Israel later on after Solomon's death.

"And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house."^c

Some Chronology. Chapter six of First Kings opens with the words,

"And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif,

^cI Kings 5:17.

which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the Lord."^d

This statement of the period of time between the Exodus and the fourth year of Solomon's reign is the usually accepted chronology of the Old Testament from the time of the Exodus. To get the time down to the accession of Cyrus to the throne of Babylon one may add the remaining years of Solomon's reign, the years of the kings of Judah, and the seventy years of exile. By this chronology, with very slight differences, the accession of Solomon to the throne is usually fixed at 1000 B. C.

This computation is really not satisfactory. Periods of time are given for most of the judges, though two or three are left out which would make the time 580 years; another computation is 600 years. St. Paul gives the time from the division of Canaan among the tribes in the sixth year of Joshua down to Samuel as 450 years. This would make the period between the Exodus and the beginning of the temple 579 years. It must be admitted that none of the computations given are entirely satisfactory. The 480 years given in I Kings quoted above does not correspond with other chronology given in the Old Testament. Some have thought the statement "480 years" an interpolation by some of the ancient scribes.

Plans of Temple. The temple of Solomon, built after the pattern of the tabernacle heretofore described, was seven years in construction. All of the

^dI Kings 6:1.

stones and timbers were cut so that the sound of the carpenters' tools was not heard when the house was put together. God had commanded, according to the law of Moses, not to lift up any iron tool on the stones of an altar.

There has been some dispute, of course, about the dimensions of the house and the peculiarities of its roof. There are those who believe that the roof of Solomon's temple was built like the tent of the tabernacle, sloping. The inside of the house was finished with cedar ornamented by carvings, and much of it overlaid with pure gold. The temple in one respect differed from the tabernacle in that there were rooms built up against it,—what we should call lean-tos. These were evidently for the accommodation of the priests and those who took care of the temple.

Solomon's Palace. "Solomon was building his own house thirteen years. * *

"He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon; the length thereof was a hundred cubits and the breadth thereof fifty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits, upon four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars."^e

In other words, it would have been about 150 feet by 75 feet, if we take the commonly accepted length of a cubit as a foot and a half. Some have held that the house of the Forest of Lebanon was built in the Lebanons themselves. This is very doubtful, as Solomon's palaces consisted of a variety of

^eI Kings 7:1, 2.

houses for different purposes and no doubt had different names. He built a separate house for the daughter of Pharaoh, and it is noted that in front of one of his palaces he built a porch for the throne where he might judge.

Here he followed out the old Israelitish custom of the judges sitting in the gate judging disputes that came up between the people. Most of the cities in those days were walled, and the entrance to them was by means of large gates at one side of which the judge sat and rendered his decisions concerning the matters of dispute among the people. So we have the gate of Justice of Granada, Spain, and in Constantinople we have the Sublime Port, or Lofty Gate.

The time consumed in building the temple was seven years; that of his palace thirteen years, a total of twenty years in which he was engaged in beautifying the city of Jerusalem.

“And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre

“He was a widow’s son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work.”^f

We may here understand that the workman was of course not the king, but a man sent by the king. In Chronicles it is said that Hiram was “the son of

^fI Kings 7:13, 14.

a woman of the daughters of Dan.” That may be true, and the discrepancy would be cured by saying that while he was the son of a woman of the tribe of Dan, she might have had as her first husband a man of the tribe of Naphtali.

Interior Furnishings. For the temple Solomon also constructed what is called “a molten sea” which was ten cubits or fifteen feet from one brim to the other and had a height of five cubits, or seven and a half feet, and a line of thirty cubits or forty-five feet was perhaps its circumference. “It contained two thousand baths,” a bath being a measure of eight and a half gallons, so that the “molten sea” was sufficiently large to hold 17,000 gallons.

“It (‘the molten sea,’ what we would call a font) stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward.”^g

Besides the font, or “molten sea” Solomon also built lavers that were used for ablutions.

“And Solomon made all the vessels that pertained unto the house of the Lord; the altar of gold, and the table of gold, whereupon the shewbread was.

“And the candlesticks of pure gold, five on the right side, and five on the left, before the oracle, with the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs of gold.

“And the bowls, and the snuffers, and the basins,

^gI Kings 7:25.

and the spoons, and the censers of pure gold; and the hinges of gold, both for the doors of the inner house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the house, to wit, of the temple.

“So was ended all the work that king Solomon made for the house of the Lord. And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated; even the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, did he put among the treasures of the house of the Lord.”^h

These contributions to the temple of gold and silver began as early as the reign of king Saul. In David's time these contributions had of course reached enormous sums, especially as David's conquests extended to the surrounding tribes, whose treasures he had confiscated. The wealth, therefore, of the temple treasury was from the beginning enormous, and naturally attracted unscrupulous kings, who had no hesitation about plundering the house of God.

The books of Kings and Chronicles give a detailed description of the great ornamentations which decorated the house of God. They must be consulted for further details concerning the construction of the temple.

Dedication of the Temple. “Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they

^hI Kings 7:48-51.

might bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion.”ⁱ

That was a great day in Jerusalem when the ark of the covenant was carried by the priests from the tabernacle to the temple of God.

“There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

“And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord.”^j

That was a great day in Israel. With all the leaders of Israel assembled in Jerusalem, Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord and, spreading forth his hands towards heaven, offered a dedicatory prayer. The prayer contains many sublime passages that are worthy of special study. One or two may here be quoted:

“When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them:

“Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance.”^k

ⁱI Kings 8:1.

^jI Kings 8:9, 10.

^kI Kings 8:35, 36.

Custom in Prayer. Praying with the face toward the temple was a common practice among the Jews. Today even it is so among the Arabs, who turn to their house of God at Mecca. Solomon prayed that the stranger might be remembered, in his supplications to God. The law of Moses was very liberal for those days toward strangers. They could not be oppressed nor vexed. They might make offerings at the tabernacle, and they might be present at the solemn readings of the law which took place once in seven years.

Concerning the people of God:

“If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near;

“Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness;

“And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name:

“Then hear thou their prayer and their supplica-

tion in heaven thy dwellingplace, and maintain their cause."^l

After Solomon had finished his dedicatory prayer, he stood in the presence of the people, and with outspread hands "blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying,

"Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. * * *

"And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord." * * *

"On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people."^m

The dedication of the temple was a land-mark in the history of Israel. Rest had come to them; blessings, peace and prosperity. It did not last long. Israel's great work, the inspiration which she gave to the world, was begotten chiefly in affliction (Note 2).

^lI Kings 8:46-49.

^mI Kings 8:56, 63, 66.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who were the Phoenicians?
2. How was material obtained for the temple built by Solomon?
3. Describe the pattern adopted for the construction of Solomon's temple.
4. How was the temple of Solomon decorated?
5. Describe the dedication of the temple.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What difficulties are found in Bible chronology?
2. What effect did temple worship have upon the unity of ancient Israel and upon the individual lives of the people?

NOTES

1. Solomon did not attain the greatness of his father. Brought up as a king's son, without the opportunity or the necessity of steeling his will in the hard school of danger and self-denial, he was also destitute of his father's energy and originality. He was more interested in the privileges of the throne and its comforts, than in its lofty duties and mission. The despotic tendencies which, in the case of his father, appeared only occasionally, and were always restrained or suppressed, became, in the case of the son, a fundamental trait of character. His chief interest was in costly buildings, foreign wives, and gorgeous display.—R. Kittel, in "A History of the Hebrews."

2. **And When Thou Hearest, Forgive!**

And when thou hearest, Holy Lord, forgive!
 Thus with wise reverence prayed King Solomon
 When, as the crowning glory of his throne,
 He claimed his God-bestowed prerogative,

And built the Temple; knowing that in all
 Man thinks or does—ay, even when he prays,
 Or, in God's house spends dedicated days—
 The taint yet lingers of our nature's fall.

Thou through whose power dead souls arise and live,
 Thou in whose name we dare presume to teach
 Of things so high, so far beyond our reach,—
 Oh, when thou hearest, Holy Lord, forgive.

—A. H. Browne.

CHAPTER 9

THE END OF SOLOMON'S REIGN

(I Kings 9-12)

Great is the glory for the strife is hard.—Wordsworth.

After Solomon had finished on Mount Moriah, the southeast hill of Jerusalem, the building of the temple, and the construction on the southwest hill, Mount Zion, of the royal palace, and had dedicated the temple to the service of God, the great and appointed work of his life was completed (Note 1). He was now growing old and appealed to the Lord in prayer, and the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time as he had done at Gibeon when He conferred upon him the great blessing of wisdom.

“And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

“And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments:

“Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel.”

If he did not keep the commandments of God, what then?

"Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people.

"And at this house, which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the Lord done thus unto this land, and to this house?"^a

King Hiram's Reward. For the part king Hiram of Tyre had taken in providing Solomon with lumber and money, Solomon gave to him twenty cities in the land of Galilee. When the Tyrian king went to look at the cities "they pleased him not." It is said that Hiram had cast his eyes on the beautiful Bay of Acra to the south of Phoenicia, and the inland cities were not attractive to him. "And he called them the land of Cabul unto this day." It is said that the word "Cabul" which is often used in our own day, has no meaning in the Hebrew language. Josephus tells us that it is a Phoenician word meaning, "displeasing."

King Hiram had sent to Solomon six score talents of gold, an amount equal in our money to a million and a quarter dollars.

Along with the temple and the royal palace, Solomon erected between them what is known in Scripture as the millo, between Mount Moriah and

^aI Kings 9:3-7.

Mount Zion. This mילו was undoubtedly a fortress located in the valley between the two hills.

The Levying System. The Canaanites, the inhabitants that Joshua had found in the land, and had not destroyed, were subject to a bond service, a system of slavery. The oppression of such a service was of course heaviest upon them when the Israelites were strongest and best able to enforce it. In the days of their weakness it was not so extensively carried out. The Canaanites were in this way made very profitable to the Israelites who were thereby enabled to escape many of the more menial kinds of labor. The Israelites would therefore naturally hesitate in destroying altogether a people whom they could thus use in a peonage system as their servants. In the days of Solomon the Israelites themselves did not escape this hardship.

The Land of Ophir. Solomon was not only powerful upon the land, but he imitated the Phoenicians by establishing a commerce upon the seas. These ships brought gold from the land of Ophir to Ezion-geber, a city somewhere near the present Acabah, the east arm of the Red Sea. Where, however the land of Ophir was, to which these ships were sent, we do not know. The location of the land of Ophir has been a subject of controversy for hundreds of years. Its location has been designated in India, Arabia, Burma, Africa, Armenia, Phrygia, Iberia, and South America. Arabia and Africa both have strong claims for the city. There has always been an objection to Arabia on the ground that it did

not produce gold. However, gold may have been brought to that country and shipped thence to Jerusalem; nor is it certain that gold never was found in the Arabian peninsula.

The Queen of Sheba. Among the distinguished visitors to Solomon in the days of his glory was the queen of Sheba. Sheba was an important kingdom of Arabia.

“And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions.

“And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.”^b

When the queen saw the palace of Solomon and the temple, and she beheld his ministers, “and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord; there was no more spirit in her.”^c

She had proved all that she had heard about this wonderful king.

“Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me; thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.” * * *

“Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because

^bI Kings 10:1, 2,

^cI Kings 10:5.

the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice."^d

She thereupon gave the king one hundred twenty talents of gold. The rich presents of Hiram and the queen of Sheba added greatly to the wealth of Solomon.

"Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold."^e

With all this gold he began the ornamentation of his palace and of the temple. His drinking vessels were of gold;

"The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round behind: and there were stays on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays.

"And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom."^f

Of all these ornaments "none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon."

"So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.

"And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart."^g

What glory! what divine favor! what wisdom! Who is there that could resist the temptations that come through them? Certainly Solomon did not.

^dI Kings 10:7, 9.

^eI Kings 10:14.

^fI Kings 10:19, 20.

^gI Kings 10:23, 24.

In the power of a young and noble manhood he was valiant for God. With old age, he felt likewise the infirmities of the will and the spirit.

“For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.”^h

Solomon's Wives. Solomon had done that which God forbade the Israelites to do when they entered the Land of Promise. He took wives from among the Canaanites, “Solomon clave unto these in love.” Solomon, therefore, to gratify the wives that he had taken from foreign nations, built for them magnificent temples to their false gods. Neither did he appear ashamed to build them close to Jerusalem. In these temples of the idols, he himself went and took part. It was an apostasy from the true worship of God, though it is said that he made sacrifices three times a year in the temple which he had built to Jehovah. But he mixed with his worship burnt incense to the idols of the heathens.

“And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice,

“And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the Lord commanded.

“Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have com-

^hI Kings 11:4.

manded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.

“Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father’s sake : but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son.

“Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom ; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake which I have chosen.”ⁱ

Jeroboam. Solomon was not permitted to die in peace.

“And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon’s servant, whose mother’s name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king.”^j

Though a man of great valor, he was not permitted to overthrow the kingdom in the days of Solomon.

“And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way ; and he clad himself with a new garment ; and they two were alone in the field :

“And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces :

“And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces : for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee :

ⁱI Kings 11:9-13.

^jI Kings 11:26.

“(But he shall have one tribe for my servant David’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:)”^k

Jeroboam fled into Egypt, and remained there until the time of Solomon’s death.

“And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years.

“And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.”^l

The Book of Chronicles is in some respects more extended in its descriptions than the First Book of Kings, from which the quotations in the text have been exclusively taken.

The Glory of Solomon. “The glory of Solomon,” “the wisdom of Solomon” are household words used frequently in the history of the Jews, and common to all the Christian world. These glories, however, were earthly glories, and the rewards of Solomon are more eagerly sought by men of worldly ambitions, than the glories of David; yet David was held by the Lord in higher esteem than his son Solomon.

Those things which men esteem success in life, the things most eagerly sought for, are not the things to which God gives the highest seal of his approval. Solomon is reminded, and all the world is reminded by the words of the Lord, that the heart

^kI Kings 11:29-32.

^lI Kings 11:42, 43.

of Solomon was not right; that it was not like that of David, who was "a man after God's own heart." "The Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." From the words of the Lord thus spoken to Samuel, we may conclude that the judgments of men respecting man are not as God's judgments.

Men's opinions, therefore, about their fellow men may not only be of no value—they may even be pernicious and harmful. How exceedingly cautious, then, we should be in drawing up an estimate of others! The more worldly-minded we are, the greater our liability to err—the more the glories of this world appeal to us the more easily we are mistaken about the eternal value of any human character.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What promise did God make to Solomon respecting the temple?
2. How did Solomon recompense Hiram of Tyre?
3. For what was the land of Ophir noted?
4. Give an account of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How are such statements concerning David as are made in I Kings 11:14 reconciled with both his sin and the statement of him in the Doctrine and Covenants?
2. God gave riches to Solomon as a reward. When may riches be regarded as a divine favor?

NOTES

1. The culminating act of Solomon's reign was the building of his palace and temple. His public buildings were reared on the northern continuation of the hill of Ophel, and

it rises gradually above the site of the ancient Jebusite city. The jagged limestone rock, still higher and farther to the north was without much doubt the ancient threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite, on which was reared the famous temple of Solomon.—Keitt.

2. Solomon's Temple Compared with Egyptian Temples. Compared with the religious buildings of Assyria, Babylon, or Egypt, a structure like the temple, apart from its vast substructures, was hardly worthy of notice, either for its size or splendor. The great temple of Amon, at Thebes, for example, ultimately extended to a length of one thousand, one hundred and seventy feet, while the ruins of its associated edifices still cover a plateau nearly four miles in circumference. Nor is the contrast between the simplicity of the Israelite temple and the splendor of those on the Nile less striking. Its exterior seems to have been entirely plain, and though there was a pillared porch, it shrank into insignificance before the long avenues of mighty columns of Egyptian sanctuaries, the alleys of sphinxes, the obelisks, and the vast pylons, all, in common with the temples themselves, covered with sculpture and ornament.

But the lavish employment of gold for the decoration of the interior of Solomon's building exceeds anything told us of other ancient temples. Israel was still wholly dependent on foreign artistic skill, and at the same time, was rigidly excluded from whatever even remotely pointed to the heathen ideas which were then the basis of all art. Only innocent details could be sanctioned, the bas-reliefs of palms and flowers, the forms of lions and oxen, and the mystical shapes of the winged cherubim were the widest range of invention or fancy permitted. Even in those, Phoenician art, borrowed from Assyria, may be traced, for the ruins of Nineveh still disclose allied conceptions and style of ornament.

CHAPTER 10

DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

(I Kings 12-14)

Men are never wise and select in the exercise of a new power.—Channing.

The Two Kings. For some time now in the history of ancient Israel, we shall have to follow a divided national life and keep in mind the fact that there are two separate opposing governments. They are the government of the north and that of the south. In the north the ten tribes belonged to what was called the kingdom of Israel, as distinguished from the kingdom of Judah, which ruled in the south.

It should here be mentioned that Benjamin, already recovering from its almost complete annihilation, was taken over into the tribe of Judah. It was a process of absorption that in time left no trace of separation between Judah and Benjamin, both tribes being known as Judah, and from whom the Jewish people of today are descended.

Benjamin's Choice. The fact that Benjamin chose an alliance with Judah is somewhat surprising to us, if we conclude that such a course was really the choice of the tribe of Benjamin. As a matter of fact, Benjamin, prior to this time, was more united with the powerful tribe of Ephraim on the north than with the tribe of Judah on the south. When Saul established the kingdom the first king was

taken from the tribe of Benjamin. Later on the choice was transferred to the house of Judah. This gave rise also to some jealousies. Then there were the wars between Joab and Abner that caused jealousy and division. We must therefore conclude that in going over to the tribe of Judah, Benjamin was actuated by the Spirit of God in casting its lot with Judah.

Divine Purpose. Here let it be said that the division of the kingdom was brought about by the special purposes of the Lord. We are not permitted to know fully all the reasons for this division, but God in His own words assumes responsibility for it. We know that the ten tribes were carried off bodily and that they disappeared altogether from the scenes of history. We know, too, that the tribe of Judah was reserved in the Land of Promise to be God's people from whom the Messiah should come, and that their history should continue down until the end of time.

Whatever has become of the rest of Israel, and wherever the blood of Ephraim may be distributed among the nations of the world, the Jews have their identity and have almost universally kept themselves separate from all other nations. We follow, therefore, the stream of national life of the kingdom of Israel only a short time. What becomes of most interest in the history of all the Jewish and Christian world, is the story of the house of Judah after it had absorbed the tribe of Benjamin. (Note 1.)

Jeroboam. The man who was to rule over the ten tribes was Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite. According to the promise of the prophet Ahijah, who lived at Shiloh, Jeroboam was to rule over the ten tribes; but in consequence of Solomon's efforts to destroy this new prince, he fled to Egypt where he remained until the death of Solomon.

Before taking up the further history of these two kingdoms, a geographical separation of them should be made. We may for general purposes conclude that Judah included all of southern Palestine as far north as the northern boundary of the tribe of Benjamin. Just where this northern boundary was we do not know exactly. It was a small strip of country extending perhaps twelve or fifteen miles north of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the southern limit of Benjamin, just across the line north from the northern limits of the tribe of Judah. Jerusalem was therefore within Benjamin's territory. Bethlehem, about three miles south of Jerusalem, would be in the territory of Judah. It was near Bethlehem that David was herding his sheep when Samuel found him.

Rehoboam. The king of Judah,—and hereafter when we speak of Judah we also include the tribe of Benjamin—was Rehoboam, a son of Solomon, who was permitted to be king over Judah, not because of God's love for His Father, but because of His exceeding great love for his grandfather David. As soon as Solomon died, Rehoboam assembled the

tribes of Israel at Shechem. This was within the territory of the ten tribes between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, a valley very much celebrated in history from the day that Abraham first came into the land down to the time of the Roman conquest.

Though Shechem had been destroyed by Abimelech, one of the sons of Gideon, it must have been rebuilt at this time, and it was for religious sentiment, therefore, a very suitable place for Rehoboam to set up his claims of ruler over the entire house of Israel. Rehoboam, however, must have known the word of the Lord in declaring a separation of the kingdom. It is hard, however, for the voice of God to reach the ears of a selfish and ambitious man. Ambition and selfishness create in such instances almost impenetrable deafness.

The Grievances of the People. The people had their grievances. The glory of Solomon and his kingdom on the one hand meant the oppression and hardship of the people on the other. They said:

“Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.”^a

Here the people sought to make terms with Rehoboam, in opposition to the purposes of God, and so it was not likely the Lord would permit Rehoboam to give them a favorable answer. He sought first the counsels of the old, who advised the king to yield to the wishes of the people; but the young

^aI Kings 12:4.

men, in their counsels, advised otherwise. It was they the king followed. So after three days he gave the people their answer as he had promised:

“And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.”^b

The people were now rebellious:

“What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.”^c

Of course there would be at this time people out of the ten tribes dwelling in the cities of Judah, and vice-versa. What was, however, at this time of greatest consequence, was the action taken by the Levites, who possessed the priesthood. They cast their lot with Judah.

The Return of Jeroboam. As soon as Jeroboam had learned of the death of Solomon, he returned to his country and placed himself at the head of Israel, the ten tribes. Jeroboam was at a disadvantage; Jerusalem was the Holy City, the temple of Solomon was there, and the ark of the covenant. In the temple the priesthood officiated. The religious influence of the people would naturally center around Jerusalem. Jeroboam therefore selected two cities, one Bethel, the other Dan, where he established altars. Bethel could not have been very

^bI Kings 12:11.

^cI Kings 12:16.

far from Jerusalem. It is north and a little east of that city. Dan was in the extreme north of the Holy Land.

The setting up of altars in these cities, and the choosing from all ranks of the people of those who officiated in sacrifices, were in violation of God's command to Moses. Rehoboam, however, was not disposed to sit quietly by and watch this division go on. He therefore assembled an army out of Judah and Benjamin, and was ready to go up against Jeroboam, when the word of the Lord through the prophet Shemaiah came to Rehoboam, saying:

“Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the Lord.”^d

Jeroboam now, to make his authority complete over all the tribes also set up a house in Penuel, beyond the river Jordan, wherein the two and a half tribes dwelt.

A Man of God. Jeroboam was king, but he was not a prophet.

“And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Beth-el: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense.”^e

The man of God said:

“Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out.

^dI Kings 12:24.

^eI Kings 13:1.

“And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Beth-el, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him.”^f

His altar was rent, according to the words of the prophet. The king was momentarily subdued, and he said:

“Intreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me again. And the man of God besought the Lord, and the king’s hand was restored him again, and became as it was before.”^g

The king would now refresh the man of God and extend him his hospitality, but this unnamed prophet replied:

“If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place;

“For so it was charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest.”^h

So the prophet went southward to his home by another road.

“Now there dwelt an old prophet in Beth-el; and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Beth-el: the words

^fI Kings 13:3, 4.

^gI Kings 13:6.

^hI Kings 13:8, 9.

which he had spoken unto the king, them they told also to their father.”ⁱ

The old prophet started out in pursuit, and found the man of God sitting under an oak, and when the latter had told the old prophet the words of the Lord, he replied:

“I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him.”^j

The man of God by these words was deceived. He returned with his seducer, and after he had eaten and drunk, saddled his animal and started back home.

“And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcass was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcass.”^k

When the old prophet learned the calamity which had befallen the man of God for his disobedience, he went and secured his body and buried it, and said:

“When I am dead then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones.”

“After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people

ⁱI Kings 13:11.

^jI Kings 13:18.

^kI Kings 13:24.

priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of 'the priests of the high places.'"¹

Thus Jeroboam sinned.

Obedience. The man of God who brought to Jeroboam a divine message that should have been heeded by the king, succumbed himself to disobedience and lost his life. The principle of obedience to the laws, to the word, and to the purposes of God is taught from the beginning to the end of Holy Writ. Obedience is a law by which human society is held together. Obedience is fundamental in the worship of Jehovah, and is the ground work of all human progress. The nearer men approach God in their lives the deeper they sense the law of obedience in all things. The feelings of obedience should be present in every man's heart.

It may be asked if we are to obey evil counsels. No,—it is naturally the rebellious heart that yields to evil counsels. A prayerful obedience is its own best interpreter of rightful authority as well as proper conduct.

Jeroboam's Deception. Jeroboam furnishes a striking illustration of his own spiritual blindness. He undertakes the most difficult piece of deception that men in this life can try—namely, the deception of God. His son Abijah fell sick. His selfish ambition created fears about his son, so he directed his wife to go up to Shiloh where the prophet Ahijah lived. It will be seen from this that all the

¹I Kings 13:31, 33.

prophets and the Levites had not yet left the tribes of Israel. His wife was to take with her certain offerings to this prophet with a view of determining what was to be the fate of their son. But the wife was to disguise herself so that the prophet should not know her. To Ahijah, however, God revealed the deception of Jeroboam, and the prophet was directed what to say to her.

“And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings.

“Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel,

“And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes;

“But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back.”^m

The woman is told to return, and that when her feet should enter the city the child should die.

It is hard to cast God behind men's backs. Jeroboam tried it, and he has been by no means the last

^mI Kings 14:6-9.

that has tried such deception. And what a spectacle,—seeking the favor of God by deception!

“And the days which Jeroboam reigned were two and twenty years: and he slept with his fathers, and Nadab his son reigned in his stead.”ⁿ

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Give an account of Rehoboam.
2. Give an account of Jeroboam's rise to favor.
3. How came the Benjamites to be included in the tribe of Judah?
4. What were the grievances of the people at the time of the death of Solomon?
5. What was Jeroboam's deception?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what way does history reveal the purposes of God in the division of the Hebrews after the death of Solomon?
2. What is your estimate of Solomon, as a man with and without a mission in life?

NOTES

1. Why was the division of the kingdom brought about by God? It was the beginning of disasters that culminated in the overthrow of both kingdoms. In a little over two centuries the northern tribes were carried off into captivity by the Assyrians and one hundred and thirty-six years later the kingdom of Judah came to an end at the hands of the Babylonians. During the century that followed the death of Solomon, Egypt was weak and Assyria was inactive, and had the tribes of the Israelites remained united they might have become a great Jewish empire, powerful enough to absorb the other kingdoms along the Mediterranean. Why, then, was this crisis, so far-reaching in its baneful effects, brought about by God? The Israelites were God's chosen people, and their peculiar mission was not to attain political success, but to receive and transmit high spiritual blessing. Political success meant oriental despotism and idolatry. Political failure meant the rule of the prophets rather than that of the kings.

ⁿI Kings 14:20.

“It was only in the furnace of affliction that those perverse, insignificant Canaanitish tribes were prepared for the reception of their commission. Approaching captivity led their prophets to open wider their spiritual eyes until they beheld, instead of a local God, of one little nation, a Lord supreme in the affairs of men and in the universe. Out of the depths of their private and national woe, those divinely enlightened men caught glimpses of the character of the Eternal and of his purposes which enabled them to rise above national annihilation and exile, and to give to their nation and the world hopes and truths and principles which are the eternal foundations of religious faith. Thus, while by the disruption the Hebrew nation lost its life, in a truer and higher sense it found it, and was prepared in turn to transmit this life and hope to humanity.”—Charles Foster Kent, in *Biblical World*.

2. “Thus it will be. Let us not be disturbed in heart. The affairs of the world will be carried on in future, as they have been in the past, by the foolishness of man and the wisdom of God.”—Wordsworth. :

CHAPTER 11

THE HOUSE OF JUDAH

(I Kings 14:18)

There was a long period of years between Rehoboam and Jehoshaphat (chapters 14 to 22) during which there was a growing separation between Israel and Judah, which clearly indicated that these two branches of Israel could not be brought together until the last days. (Note.) We are early shown that in the division of the kingdom the ten tribes were to be scattered.

“For the Lord shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river.”^a

Down south at Jerusalem Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, ruled. He was forty-one years old when he mounted the throne, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem.

Judah, like Israel, did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the people under Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem, and robbed the house of God of its treasures. The king took away the shields of gold that Solomon had made. The record of Judah, especially under Asa is given at some length in the Second Book of Chronicles.

Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijam

^aI Kings 14:15.

(also written Abijah), and Abijam by his son Asa, who is characterized as one of the good kings of Judah, and who reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem. Asa removed out of his kingdom the idols which some of the people continued to worship,—idols that his father had made. He removed his mother from being queen—she enjoyed the rank of queen mother—because she had made an idol in a grove.

There would naturally be some contention between the two kingdoms. Baasha, who was king of Israel, for example, undertook to make a fortification of Ramah not far from Jerusalem, that the people of Judah might be hemmed in. Asa, to release himself of this siege, entered into a league with Ben-hadad, king of Syria. This, however, was not pleasing to the Lord, and it was followed by the rebuke of the prophet Hanani:

“Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand.”^b

In his old age Asa was diseased in his feet, and in time he, too, slept with his fathers, and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead.

The Kingdom of Israel During the Reign of Asa. During the long reign of Asa a number of kings ruled in Israel. In a work of this character the lives of these kings do not merit any notice. Nadab

^bII Chron. 16:7.

succeeded Jeroboam. The house of Jeroboam was overthrown by Baasha, who overthrew Nadab and ruled in his stead.

“And it came to pass, when he reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite.”^c

Jeroboam had established his kingdom in the beginning at Shechem. Later on the capital of his kingdom was moved north to Tirzah. Baasha did evil in the sight of God, and was succeeded by his son Elah. Elah and his house were overthrown, and he was succeeded by Zimri, one of his officers, who in turn slew all the house of Baasha. This rebellion was followed by another that placed Omri on the throne. His rule was followed for a short time by a division in the kingdom.

Omri is noted in history as having purchased the hill of Samaria, a beautiful location north and a little west of Shechem. It was one of those high places that could be fortified, which had on it springs, and the country about it was very productive. But Omri was worse than all that were before him, and he likewise slept with his fathers, and was succeeded by his son Ahab. Ahab's name is made somewhat famous from the fact that a great prophet appeared to the house of Israel represented in the ten tribes, and through the manifestation of

^cI. Kings 15:29.

God's power endeavored to win the people from their idolatry:

"And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.

"In his days did Hiel the Beth-elite build Jericho; he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun."^d

The sacred warning of Joshua had for all these centuries, and during all the wickedness of all the tribes of Israel, been respected. Hiel was not only among those who were disobedient to God, but he had fallen so low that he manifested the utmost contempt for God's warning.

Elijah and the Ravens. From beyond the Jordan in the land of Gilead among the two and a half tribes, there appeared a prophet in Israel, whose name was a household word in ancient Israel, and who is celebrated in our own time by the mission he has performed to the Latter-day Saints. He is Elijah, the Tishbite. Of Elijah's home in Tishbeh we have no other account than the brief reference in the Scripture. Josephus said it existed in his day under the name of Thesbone.

This new prophet appeared before Ahab and declared that there should be no dew nor rain "these years in the land of Israel." After delivering this message, the prophet is commanded to return to

^dI Kings 16:17.

the east of Jordan and hide himself "by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan."

"And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. * * *

"And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

"* * After a while the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land."^e

Elijah and the Widow. And Elijah was commanded to go into the country of Sidon. The Lord said: "Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."^f

Upon his arrival in Sidon at Zarephath, he found a widow woman who was gathering sticks, and he asked that she bring a little water in a vessel.

"And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

"And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

"And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

^eI Kings 17:4-7.

^fI Kings 17:9.

“For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.

“And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.”^g

After that the son fell sick, and there was no breath left in him. The woman was in great distress. She felt that Elijah’s presence was the cause of her son’s death. He had come into her home and thereby brought her to the knowledge of the Lord, who was thus punishing her for her sins. Elijah took the son up into a loft and laid him upon his own bed.

“And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again.”^h

The child was restored to life and returned to his mother.

Elijah Meets Ahab. The voice of the Lord came again to Elijah and promised the restoration of rain. He was to go up, however, to Samaria and present himself to King Ahab. At about the time of Elijah’s new call Ahab commanded Obadiah to go

^gI Kings 17:11-16.

^hI Kings 17:21.

in quest of water and grass to save the remnants of their horses and mules. It was this same Obadiah who had hid a hundred prophets in the cave when Jezebel, the wicked wife of Ahab, was bringing them to their destruction. While Obadiah was on his way in quest of water and grass he met Elijah: "and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that, my lord Elijah?"

"And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here."ⁱ

Obadiah was fearful of the king and hesitated; but he told Elijah that his Lord had sent in all countries round about messengers to find the prophet. Obadiah said:

"And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth."^j

This is the beginning of a new instance of God's power by which human beings are transported supernaturally from place to place. After Elijah's assurance that he would appear before the king, Obadiah did as he was commanded, for he was a man in whose heart was the love of God. Ahab then went to meet Elijah.

"When Ahab saw Elijah Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"^k

ⁱI Kings 18:7, 8.

^jI Kings 18:12.

^kI Kings 18:17.

Elijah and the Prophets of Baal. The prophet here reminds the king that it is he that has offended God by his worship of the gods of Baal. "Let the prophets of this god four hundred and fifty be gathered on Mount Carmel," was the order of Elijah, that they might learn whether Jehovah ruled and had power, or Baal, the god of the Canaanites. By order of the king, these prophets were commanded to offer up one of two bullocks, while Elijah offered the other. For this sacred contest all Israel had gathered unto Mount Carmel, a range of mountains extending from the southern and middle part of the valley of Esdraelon out westward to the Mediterranean Sea.

After the altars had been constructed and the wood placed upon them, the offering was to be burned by fire called forth either by the prophets of Baal or by Elijah. It was a contest between him and them, and was to determine whose god should be recognized and worshiped. Furthermore, Elijah put four barrels of water in a trench about the altar which he had made. When all was in readiness, Elijah taunted the prophets of Baal by mocking them. He said:

"Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.

"And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them."¹

¹ I Kings 18:27, 28.

Cutting the body and causing the blood to gush forth in religious ceremonies was a practice of those early days that has been handed down among some of the Oriental nations, and is practiced in certain places today. There is a sect of the Mohammedans that follow this ghastly practice in memory of two great heroes in the history of Islam. The writer has seen in Constantinople the religious rites of this sect celebrated when its devotees marched clad in white and at the same time inflicted upon their heads and bodies wounds from which the blood gushed, and presented the most horrible appearance. It is done in the belief that God takes pleasure in the shedding of human blood.

After the failure of the prophets of Baal to call forth fire, Elijah, who had constructed his altar out of twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel said:

“Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. * * *

“Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.”^m

Elijah commanded that the prophets of Baal be taken down to the brook Kishon, where he slew them.

^mI Kings 18:36, 38.

“And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.”ⁿ

Rain Falls. He doubtless heard the rustle of the wind which in that country is the announcement of rain, brought from the clouds that are filled by evaporation from the Mediterranean sea. So Elijah commanded his servants to go up on the mountain toward the sea, and seven times they went and looked over to the Mediterranean, and the seventh time they beheld a little cloud, “like a man’s hand.” “And there was a great rain.”

“And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.”^o

The capital was still at Samaria, and to one side, at a place called Jezreel, Ahab had built him two Baalim. Elijah went to the gate, but did not go inside. Perhaps he feared the treachery of the queen, Jezebel, or the inhabitants. The Arabs of our own day can hardly be induced to enter walled cities. Their experiences and the traditions handed down to them make them constantly fearful of some treachery.

Ahab’s queen, Jezebel, was a blood-thirsty woman, a daughter of the king of Tyre, and Elijah was no doubt anxious to learn what her course of conduct would be as she domineered her husband and compelled him to act in conformity to her wishes. One might imagine that such an event as the mani-

ⁿI Kings 18:41.

^oI Kings 18:46.

festation of God's power at Carmel would have softened the hearts of all; but those who crave power for themselves are often jealous, sometimes murderously jealous, of power in others, even though it be divine power.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. For what was the capital of the kingdom of Israel—Shechem—noted?
2. Give account of the reign of Asa at Jerusalem.
3. What events attended the rebuilding of Jericho?
4. Give an account of the visit of Elijah to Ahab.
5. Give an account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the relative powers of Babylon and Egypt during this period of history?
2. Why was God displeased when Asa entered into an alliance with Ben-hadad, king of Syria?

NOTE

The movement known in modern times as Zionism, a movement which is leading large numbers of Jews to find homes in Palestine, contemplates the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine under the protection of the European powers. It should not be looked upon as an effort of the Jewish people to realize in this age their old dream—of a world power in Palestine, to which all nations of the earth would pay homage. In it, however, we see still persisting the hope of a future for the Jewish people, which is the expression of an optimism upheld through all the ages by firm trust in Jehovah.

CHAPTER 12

THE WANDERINGS OF ELIJAH

(I Kings 19-22)

Elijah was not long in learning what Jezebel thought about him, even though the power of Jehovah had deeply affected her husband, King Ahab.

“Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.”^a

He must, if she had her way, suffer the penalty of death, as he had inflicted death upon the false prophets. Elijah fled and came to Beer-sheba, on the southern extremity of the land of Judea. This southern district in the first division was assigned to Simeon, but by this time it was all absorbed by Judah. How many of the tribe of Simeon remained with Judah we are not told.

Elijah Flees Into the Wilderness. Elijah no doubt felt that he was unsafe as long as he remained in the territory of Judah, as Jehoshaphat might deliver him up to King Ahab. He therefore made his way through the wilderness that he might reach a place of safety. The first day on the journey he sat under a juniper tree, tired, no doubt famished, disheartened. If people would thus rebel against

^aI Kings 19:2.

the power of God so wonderfully manifested to them, what chance was there for his life? And moreover, what chance was there of turning apostate Israel back again to the worship of God?

No doubt to Elijah his mission appeared a failure. Its effects were not immediate,—not even distantly apparent to him. He was disappointed: “and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.”

“And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold then an angel of the Lord touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat.

“And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.”^b

Again at the command of the angel he ate.

“And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.”^c

There he lodged in the cave in the mountain made sacred by God’s appearance to Moses there, and doubly sacred as the place of origin of the Ten Commandments. And the Lord said:

“What doest thou here, Elijah? (Note 1).

“And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even

^bI Kings 19:4-6.

^cI Kings 19:8.

I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."^d

Wonderful Manifestation. Here follows one of the most beautiful passages of Holy Writ. Elijah was not to go unrewarded. And what greater reward is there in life than the assurance which comes to man in a high or lowly estate that he enjoys the favor of God? So the divine command came to Elijah:

"Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:

"And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still, small voice.

"And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?"^e

The prophet repeated his zeal for God, and his lamentation that Israel had forsaken their covenants with Jehovah.

"And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy

^dI Kings 19:10.

^eI Kings 19:11-13.

way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria:

“And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.

“And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.

“Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”^f

These are beautiful passages of Scripture worth memorizing. There is in Horeb a traditional cave of Elijah, on the high summit of the mountain of Moses, just large enough for a man's body. The religious enthusiasts of the Holy Land have located for their own satisfaction and gratification in their own form of worship, nearly all the historical places made sacred by the dealings of God with his children, ancient Israel.

“God is in the still, small voice.” What a beautiful expression of His nearness to man, of the ease by which His presence may be heard and felt.

“And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entering in of the cave.” The mantle of the prophet in those days is said to have been an upper garment or short cloak worn over the shoulders, made of untanned sheepskin. This covering,

^fI Kings 19:15-18.

with a strip of leather around his loins, was the outer garment of the prophet. It was like the garment of camel's hair described in the dress of John the Baptist.

Elisha Called. Elijah had fled southward. He was now commanded to return northward to Damascus, the capital of Syria, at this time a nation of unbelievers, whose king, Hazael, Elijah was to anoint. He seems first to have met his successor, Elisha, "who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him."^g

Elisha understood the call, and immediately left his oxen, and ran after the prophet. In rendering his duty, therefore, to Jehovah, he also remembered his father and his mother, and he asked that he might return to kiss them. Elijah replied, "Go back again: for what have I done to thee?"—as much as to say, "Go back and go on with thy plowing."

Elisha simply returned to his oxen, slew a yoke of them, boiled their flesh, and gave the meat to the people to eat. "Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

Ben-hadad. The prophet's mission to Hazael, whom he was to anoint king over Syria, and to Jehu, whom he was to anoint king over Israel, was not so quickly performed as that by which Elisha was called to be his successor.

Ben-hadad was now king over Syria, and he be-

^gI Kings 19:19.

gan his wars against Ahab. In these wars the power of Jehovah was manifested in behalf of Israel, and the Syrians were miraculously defeated, and almost entirely destroyed. These wars on the part of Israel were followed at the behest of an unknown prophet, supposed by some to be Micah.

Jezebel. In the midst of them Jezebel comes to light, and reveals her unsavory character. Her husband, the king, coveted a vineyard of Naboth that was close to the palace of the king at Jezreel. The king offered to buy it, or to exchange land of equal value, but Naboth would not give up his inheritance. The disappointment distressed the king, whose wife, Jezebel, noticed that his spirit was sad and that he did not care to eat. When she learned the cause of his trouble, she said to the king,

“Arise and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”^h

She thereupon entered into a conspiracy that brought about Naboth's death. Ahab, who was a mere creature of his wife Jezebel, now took possession of the inheritance of Naboth.

Elijah Appears Again. It was not long, however, before the word of the Lord through Elijah came again to Ahab:

“Thus saith the Lord, in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. * * *

^hI Kings 21:7.

“And of Jezebel, also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.”ⁱ

But Ahab, who was a weak man, still had some faith in Jehovah, although he had not the strength to throw off the evil influence of a wicked wife. She sinned doubly: first, she exercised authority that was not hers; and secondly, she sinned from a wicked heart. God must have pitied Ahab. He needed pity, not alone for his sins, but for the loss of his dignity and authority by delivering himself over to the misuse of his heathen wife.

“Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house.”^j

Thus were the wars of Ahab with the Syrians ended.

Alliance Between the Kings of Judah and Israel.

Over in Gilead there remained a place called Ramoth which was still in the hands of the Syrians. To restore it to his kingdom Ahab, king of Israel, entered into an alliance with Jehoshaphat, who now was king of Judah. Jehoshaphat was anxious to know the will of the Lord, and directed Ahab to consult the prophets. Ahab assembled about four hundred of them, and they at once counseled war. Jehoshaphat, however, was not satisfied. He doubted their favor with Jehovah. He asked:

ⁱI Kings 21:19, 23.

^jI Kings 21:29.

“Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may inquire of him?”^k

There was one of whom King Ahab knew; he disliked him, but would send for him in order to satisfy Jehoshaphat. He answered:

“There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so.”^l

Micaiah came, and spoke as the Lord directed him. He knew that this war proposed by these two kings meant the death of Ahab, who should fall in the country of Gilead.

“And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.”^m

Ahab was piqued by the words of the prophet and said to Jehoshaphat: “Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?”ⁿ

Now follows a most remarkable vision to Micaiah:

“And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.

^kI Kings 22:7.

^lI Kings 22:8.

^mI Kings 22:17.

ⁿI Kings 22:18.

“And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.

“And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him.

“And the Lord said unto him Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also; go forth, and do so.

“Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.”^o

This was too much for one of the prophets of Ahab, Zedekiah, who “smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?

“And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself.”^p

This false prophet should know when he should get word of Ahab’s death, and seek to hide himself from the vengeance of Ahaziah or Jezebel which way the Spirit went.

Death of Ahab. The two kings went up to battle. The king of Israel was shot with an arrow, and was taken into a chariot. And after the battle every man

^oI Kings 22:19-23.

^pI Kings 22:24, 25.

was commanded to return to his city, and the dead king was brought to Samaria. His blood was washed from the chariot and the dogs licked it up; "According unto the word of the Lord which he spake."

Ahab slept with his fathers. We are told that Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, now began to rule over Judah; that he was then thirty-five years old, and that he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem; that he walked in the ways of his father and did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord; that he "made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold; but they went not: for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber."^q

Ahab was succeeded by his son Ahaziah, who reigned two years over Israel. He likewise sinned and followed the example of his father.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who was Jezebel?
2. Give an account of Elijah's journey to Horeb.
3. What was the message of God to Elijah at Horeb?
4. How was Elisha called to be successor to Elijah?
5. What was the vision Micaiah?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Elijah fled to Beer-Sheba. The British army is now (Aug. 1917) at that town. Describe the country about Beer-Sheba.
2. Simplify in your conception the words, "God is in the still, small voice."

^qI Kings 22:48.

NOTE

1. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there shall thy hand lead me,
And thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say, Surely the darkness shall overwhelm me,
And the light about me shall be night;
Even the darkness hideth not from thee,
But the night shineth as the day:
The darkness and the light are both alike to thee."
—Psalms.

CHAPTER 13

THE LAST DAYS OF ELIJAH

(I Kings 1-2)

Upon the death of Ahab (Note), the king of Israel, the people of Moab rebelled. During Ahab's reign they were placed under enormous tributes. It was customary also for subject peoples in those ancient times to rebel upon the death of the king who held them in subjection. The son of Ahab, Ahaziah, we are told fell down from a lattice in the upper chamber and was sick, and that he sent to Ekron, one of the northern towns of the Philistines, to inquire of Baal-zebub whether he should recover from his disease. Baal-zebub means properly the god of flies. In those times among the heathen nations all kinds of calamities had their averting gods, whose business it was to keep off things that were calamitous to the people, and the fly is one of the calamities to those Oriental countries. The Greeks worshiped a fly-averting god, and the Romans likewise acknowledged a similar one.

Elijah. The messengers that were now taking the inquiry from their king to the heathen god met Elijah on the way, who informed them that their king should not recover. It was a great offense: Ahab, and those before him, while given to heathen idolatry, consulted the professed prophets of the Israelitish nation. When the king learned that his

messengers had been stopped by a man, he asked for the man's description, and they told him that "he was a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins," and he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

The king must have known about Elijah's fame, for he sent a captain and fifty of his men to bring him down; but when they had come to him, the prophet said,

"If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven and consumed him and his fifty."^a

Again, fifty others were sent and likewise consumed. When the third set of messengers came, they prayed for their delivery, and the angel of the Lord came to Elijah and bade him go down to the king, and to be not afraid.

The message, however, of Elijah to the king gave no relief; he died, according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken.

Jehoram now reigned as king of Israel. It is the history of this rebellion of Moab that is in part inscribed upon the Moabite stone which was discovered in 1869.

Elijah Translated. Elijah now closes his mortal career. We have already learned that as he was passing through the field one day where Elisha was plowing, he cast his mantle upon Elisha, who thereupon followed the prophet to the end of his

^aII Kings 1:10.

earthly career. We are not permitted to know much of the relationships that existed between these two very remarkable men. After the events above recorded, we find them together at Gilgal where the Israelites had camped after they first crossed the river Jordan.

“And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el.”^b

From Bethel Elijah was sent to Jericho, and Elisha repeated his determination to follow the prophet.

“And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.”^c

So Elisha was steadfast in his determination to remain by Elijah. When they reached the Jordan,

“Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

“And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And

^bII Kings 2:2.

^cII Kings 2:5.

Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

“And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

“And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more; and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

“He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan.”^d

The same miracle which Elijah performed Elisha repeated when he in turn crossed the river going back to Jericho.

After the new prophet had crossed the river, he met the sons of the prophets, who asked that they be permitted fifty strong to cross the river and go on to the mountains of Moab to seek Elijah, as the Scriptures say:

“Lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley.”^e

^dII Kings 2:8-13.

^eII Kings 2:16.

Spring Purified by Elisha. It was not agreeable to Elisha, but when he was ashamed to deny them further their repeated requests, they were finally permitted to go. But the men were not successful in their search after their missing prophet. The men of the city of Jericho remind Elisha of the pleasant situation of the place, but they call his attention to the fact that the water is bad, and that the ground is barren. So the prophet asks that they bring him a new cruse and put salt into it.

“And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.

“So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.”^f

There is a spring probably a mile from Jericho, or from the site of the ancient town, whose water is still pleasant and sweet to drink. The water, however, that comes from the springs at the base of the mountains of Judea farther west is generally brackish. This was a beneficent miracle which was wrought in behalf of the people who loved and trusted Elisha.

His first journey from Jericho was to Beth-el, which was situated upon the large mountain northwest of Jericho. As he went up through the brush on his way to Beth-el, “there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head

^fII Kings 2:21, 22.

“And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.”^g

We are not permitted to know all the circumstances surrounding this event. It was doubtless in harmony with some divine purpose. These children were evidently of irreligious parents who had no respect for a prophet of God, and it may have been that their parents needed a very striking example of the punishment meted out to those who mock God's chosen servants.

It should always, however, be remembered, that death is not necessarily a calamity. Death may have for some a beneficent purpose. It may mean relief from worldly troubles, or it may mean advancement to a happier life beyond. In this case death was a punishment, and we must assume that as a punishment it could not be greater and was not greater than the offense. What death meant to these little ones under the circumstances is a part of the future divine judgment which we cannot fathom, and which has not been revealed to us.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of Baal-zebub?
2. What happened to the messenger sent by Ahab to Elijah?
3. Narrate the closing scenes in Elijah's life.
4. Give an account of Elisha.
5. Where was the capital of the kingdom during the reign of Ahab?

^gII Kings 2:23, 24.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is meant by "a double portion of thy spirit?"
2. What was there in the life of Elijah to qualify him for his mission in the last days—turning the hearts of the children, etc?

NOTE

Ahab evidently sought in every way to develop the commercial resources of his kingdom. His marriage with Jezebel, the daughter of the Tyrian king, was intended to cement more closely the relations with this great commercial people on the west. Viewed from the point of view of world politics, Ahab's policy in maintaining the natural boundaries and in developing the commercial resources of his nation was sound. By his contemporaries he was doubtless regarded as a most successful king. His fatal mistake, however, was that of Solomon; in his pursuit of material splendor he disregarded the inherited beliefs and rights of his subjects. The official recognition of the Canaanite worship of his Phoenician queen was even more of a menace to the pure worship of Jehovah in Northern Israel in the days of Ahab than in Jerusalem in the days of Solomon. Northern Israel was pre-eminently Baal's land. Here the Canaanites had been most strongly entrenched and their religious traditions still perverted the land. Communication with the Canaanites on the Mediterranean coast was exceedingly close and there was much in these ancient Baal cults to attract the prosperous, pleasure-loving, cosmopolitan people of Northern Israel.

CHAPTER 14

ELISHA—A CHAPTER OF MIRACLES

(II Kings 3-8)

The utter overthrow and destruction of the house of Ahab and his Phoenician queen, Jezebel, was predicted by the prophet Elijah; but it was left to Elisha, the prophet, to carry out the work which Elijah began. In Elisha's times the chief wars carried on were between the Syrians, whose capital was Damascus, (Note) and the heathen tribes beyond the Jordan now generally known as the Moabites, or inhabitants of the country of Moab.

Water Produced Miraculously. In one of these wars, the kings of Judea and Israel joined. When they began to suffer from lack of water they inquired among their armies for a prophet who might relieve them from their sufferings. On this occasion Elisha was found in their midst. Elisha, however, had no pleasure whatever in the kings and people of Israel. He said:

"As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee."^a

By his presence and his priestly power he called forth water that served the armies of both Israel and Judah, and spared to them their cattle and their

^aII Kings 3:14.

beasts of burden. These wars and contentions are contained in the Second Book of Kings and in the Second Book of Chronicles. It is thought best here to follow rather the life of the prophet Elisha than the details of wars whose cruelties and abominations are mere repetitions of what Israel had been suffering for centuries.

It was during this period that Elisha performed a number of miracles. In the first place, a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets complained to Elisha that her husband was dead, and that his creditors had come to take away her two sons in bondage for the payment of the debt. The law of Moses, like the law of the Greeks and the Romans, recognized servitude as a payment for debt, and provided that a man might not only pledge himself but his family in payment. The poor woman had nothing in her house but a pot of oil.

The Miracle of the Oil. She was commanded to borrow from her neighbors all the vessels that she could, and the oil was multiplied as vessel after vessel was filled by the pouring out of the small quantity that she had in her home, until she had enough to pay her debts and redeem her sons from bondage.

The Shunammite. The Shunammite is called a great woman in the Scriptures, and she entertained the prophet Elisha as he passed by her home, and built on to the wall of the house a small chamber where he and his servant Gehazi might find ac-

commodations for the night. Elisha was disposed to bless the good woman, and he was reminded by his servant that she was childless, and that her husband was old. According to the words of Elisha, however, she became a mother. In time the child died. Her confidence in the prophet was unbounded, and she set out for this man of God to Mount Carmel. When she laid before the prophet her sorrows, the prophet returned with her to her home.

“And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.

“Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.”^a

While Elisha was in the land of famine, “There came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat.”

“And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof.”^b

^aII Kings 4:34, 35.

^bII Kings 4:42, 43.

And there was bread left after the miraculous feeding of the hundred men.

Healing the Leper. There was among the Syrians a man whose name was Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, "but he was a leper." The Syrians had among them a little maid, a captive whom they had taken out of Israel, "and she waited on Naaman's wife."

"And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy."^c

This remark created faith in the captain of the king's host that he might be cured, so he went with his horses and chariots to the door of Elisha, who commanded the leper saying:

"Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean."^d

At this "Naaman was wroth." There were rivers near Damascus better, to his mind, than all the waters of Israel to which he would not lose his loyalty; but he yielded to the words of the prophet and the persuasions of his servants and dipped himself seven times in the river Jordan, as he was commanded, when "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

The leper had brought with him large sums of money and presents for the prophet, but the prophet would not make gain out of the gifts of

^cII Kings 5:3.

^dII Kings 4:10.

God, and refused to receive the presents. Such, however, was not the spirit of his servant Gehazi, who, after Naaman had left, ran after him and made him believe that the prophet had changed his mind as to some of the presents, which the servant brought back. When he approached his master, the prophet, he denied even being absent. Whereupon the prophet said:

“Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?”

“The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.”^e

The prophet had read the secret thoughts of the selfish heart that was in Gehazi. He not only had lied to his master, but had lied to God.

An Ax Made to Float. The sons of the prophets, with the permission of Elisha, went down to Jordan to build houses where they might dwell, and the prophet went with them. As one was felling a beam, “the ax head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.”

“And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim.”^f

^eII Kings 5:26, 27.

^fII Kings 6:5, 6.

After this, the prophet reads the thoughts of the king of Syria, and warns the king of Israel not to go where the Syrians were lying in wait for him. When the king of Syria learned that it was Elisha the prophet that read his secret thoughts and purposes, the Syrian king said to one of his servants:

“Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan,” (where Joseph was when he was sold into Egypt.)

“Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.

“And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, a host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

“And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

“And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”^g

According to the prayer of Elisha, the Lord smote the people with blindness, and the prophet led them to Samaria, where through the prayer of the prophet, their eyes were opened. The king of Israel was anxious to smite the Syrians, but the

^gII Kings 6:13-17.

prophet forbade it, and ordered that bread and water might be set before them, that they might eat and drink.

Famine Broken. In the course of time the Syrians came up against the people of Israel again, and the people, through their idolatry and apostasy were afflicted by a great famine that came to the land. All these marvels and divine evidences were insufficient to humble the king of Israel or his people. For the sorrows that had come upon them Elisha was blamed, and the king sought his life.

In the course of time the famine was broken.

“And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?”^h

In the midst of this calamitous condition the Syrians had come up against the kingdom of Israel. These leprous men decided to go to the army of the Syrians, and, in quest of food among them risk their lives. But the Syrians were frightened by the strange noises, which they heard, and which were caused by the power of God. They interpreted these noises to mean the hosts of the Israelites and the various nations which the Israelites had employed to fight the Syrians. The latter fled in confusion, and left their animals and their provisions. They were followed by the people to the Jordan: “and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away, in

^hII Kings 7:3.

their haste. And the messengers returned, and told the king."ⁱ

Elisha Appears in Damascus. While Ben-hadad was king of Syria, Elisha came to Damascus, where he found the king sick. Hazael, the chief general of the king, went out to meet the prophet and take to him the presents which required forty camels to carry. The king would know from the prophet whether he should die.

"Go say unto him," said Elisha, "Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die.

"And he settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept.

"And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child."^j

The Lord had showed Elisha that Hazael should yet be king over Syria, but the fears that caused the prophet to weep brought forth indignant expressions from Hazael:

"Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria."^k

This prophecy was fulfilled when Hazael smoth-

ⁱII Kings 7:15.

^jII Kings 8:10-12.

^kII Kings 8:13.

ered the king, and took the reigns of government. Notwithstanding Hazael's indignant reply, he did what the prophet feared. Hazael may have been actuated by good intentions at the time he made his indignant reply. He may have thought it impossible for him to injure a people whose prophet had foretold for him such power. Men, however, are not always their own keepers. They are not the architects of their own fortunes. They are rather creatures of those whom they enlist to serve. Hazael served evil spirits and he placed himself in their keeping, and carried out their mandates to destroy the people, as the prophet said he would do.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why had Elisha so little pleasure in the alliance between Israel and Judah?
2. What was the law of bondage in the matter of debts?
3. What was the miracle of the oil?
4. Give an account of the Shunammite.
5. Give an account of Naaman the Syrian leper.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe the finding and translation of the "Moabite Stone."
2. How do you account for the healing of the leper, who was required to "wash in Jordan seven times?"

NOTE

The Aramean kingdom. Northern Israel suffered from its exposed position. At first there was war between Judah and its northern rival, which resulted disastrously for the southern kingdom. To aid them in the conflict, the southern Israelites made the fatal mistake of calling in the Arameans to attack their foes on the north. By this time the Arameans had taken possession of northern Syria and established

themselves at the ancient city of Damascus, which lay on a fertile oasis out in the desert, on the border line between Syria and northern Arabia. By virtue of its central position it commanded the land trade of Egypt, Palestine, and Phoenicia on the west, and of Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Babylon on the east. It was "the harbor of the desert." The Aramean kingdom, with its capital at this favorable point, rapidly developed great wealth and military resources, and soon became a menace to the independence of both Hebrew kingdoms, for the natural line of expansion of this Aramean kingdom was toward the south. The exposed position of Damascus alone saved the Hebrews from complete subjugation.—Kent.

CHAPTER 15

OVERTHROW OF THE HOUSE OF AHAB

(II Kings 8-14)

It will be noticed at this period of history that the two kingdoms of Israel were different, not only in the men who ruled over them as kings, but in the general disposition of Israel to be idolatrous and Judah to worship the true and living God. Israel had fallen into a hopeless condition; her kings had sinned, and the people were filled with the spirit of idolatry.

Evil days fell upon Judah; bad kings ruled over the people occasionally, but there was enough salt in the tribe to keep it intact and within God's purposes until the coming of the Son of God. There was some intermarriage between Judah and Israel. They joined in battle against the common enemies beyond the Jordan, but they remained almost entirely distinct.

House of Ahab Destroyed. · The day of the final overthrow of the house of Ahab had come, and Elisha sent one of the children of the prophets up to Ramoth-gilead with a box of oil to anoint Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, king over Israel. The captains of the hosts who were there proclaimed Jehu king. It was the mission of the new king to destroy utterly the hosts of Ahab. In his battles with the Syrians Jehoram had been

wounded and returned to his palace at Jezreel, where he hoped to be healed.

Joram (or Jehoram) the king, made ready with his troops to meet Jehu, the newly anointed king.

“And Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out against Jehu, and met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite.

“And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu? And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?”

Joram turned and fled: “And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sunk down in his chariot.”^a

They also smote king Ahaziah, who fled to Megiddo, where he died.

“And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his sepulchre with his fathers in the city of David.”^b

Jehu then went to Jezreel, where, by his command the king's wicked queen was likewise put to death. In addition to the destruction of Ahab and his wife, Jehu caused the destruction of his seventy sons.

“So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kins-

^aII Kings 9:21-24.

^bII Kings 9:28.

folks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining.”^c

Destruction of the Priests of Baal. His next mission was the destruction of the priests of Baal.

“And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much.

“Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did it in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshipers of Baal.”^d

A solemn assembly was proclaimed; the priests were brought together, everyone that could be found, and Jehu’s captains smote them with the edge of the sword, and he brought out their images, and broke them in pieces and burned them.

“And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.”^e (Note.)

During these troublous times Israel was certainly seething in a caldron of discontent and death. There was some saving salt in the kingdom of Judah, and the willingness of this tribe to serve God

^cII Kings 10:11.

^dII Kings 10:18, 19.

^eII Kings 10:30.

was in striking contrast to the almost universal apostasy of the other tribes known as Israel. Judah, however, now entered upon a period of misfortunes.

Athaliah. When Ahaziah died his mother Athaliah seized the reins of government "and destroyed all the seed royal."

This woman possessed something of the spirit of her mother Jezebel, who was a Phoenician. If they were a fair representation of the condition of the idolatrous nations surrounding the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, then the latter were immeasurably better than anything to be found in the heathen world of that day.

As long as Athaliah's son lived, she enjoyed the high rank of queen-mother or gebirah, the most powerful place in the household of an Oriental king. Upon the destruction by Athaliah of all in the house of her son who would be likely to claim a title to royalty, she made herself ruler over the kingdom of Judah. There was, however, a grandson, who did not become a victim to her murderous designs. Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, took Joash, or as he at times is called, Jehoash, as a child and concealed him in the house of the Lord for six years. At the end of this period the priest Jehoiada gathered the warriors at the house of the Lord, and bringing forth the young boy, proclaimed him the king of Judah. This resulted in the downfall of Athaliah who was put to death.

The government, during the period of the minority of Jehoash was now in the hands of Jehoiada,

the priest. Thus there came to be exercised over the people a priestly authority, much like that of Samuel. During the administration of this priest a considerable reformation was brought about in Judah. There began the destruction of the altars of Baal, whose images were broken to pieces, and whose priests were put to death, before the altar of the heathens.

Jehu and Jehoash were now reigning over Israel and Judah, and for forty years the latter reigned in Jerusalem. As long as the young king followed the instructions of the priest Jehoiada things went well in the land, and the young king "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." However, the high places were not destroyed.

What there was about the charm of these elevations that attracted the worship of the Israelites we do not know. The high places where Baal was worshiped may have been preserved largely because the earliest inhabitants of the land continued to occupy them. The most satisfactory explanation, however, is that while the Israelites frequently destroyed the idols and the worship of Baal in those places where their own people lived, they generally left undisturbed the religious worship of the Canaanites, who preferred the high places and the mountain tops as a sanctuary for their gods.

The Temple Repaired. It was during the reign of this king that repairs in the temple took place. A money chest was set beside the altar in the house of the Lord, and all the money that was contributed

for religious purposes was placed in the chest. With this treasury, the work on the temple was carried on, chiefly by those who belonged to the tribe of Levi, whose special business it had been in the wilderness to care for the ark or for the tabernacle of the covenant, and whose business it had now become to care for and keep in repair the temple itself.

King Jehoahaz of Israel. While Joash was reigning in Jerusalem, Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, was ruling in Samaria, the capital of Israel. Almost all the rulers of the northern kingdom were men of the type of its first king, Jeroboam. Jehoahaz, opposed the Lord and yielded unto the nations surrounding him, especially the Syrians, the strongest people with whom the Israelites had yet come in contact. The Syrians began to overrun the country from the north. The people did not long remain true to the worship of Jehovah, and came under the constant attacks of the Syrians, whose chief city at this time was Damascus. Jehoahaz was succeeded by Joash.

Death of Elisha. We now have two kings by that name, one of Judah and the other of Israel. Joash comes upon the scene at a time when Elisha closes his career. The prophet must have been very old by this time, and for many years he had apparently disappeared from sight. When on his deathbed, Joash, the king of Israel, visited him. The prophet said: "Take bow and arrows." The king did as he was commanded, and Elisha put his

hand upon the king's hand and said, "Open the window eastward, and shoot." It was to be the arrow of God's deliverance from the Syrians whom Joash smote at Aphek, and consumed them. Again the prophet said to the king, "Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed." Elisha was angry and said,

"Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.

"And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year."^f

As we have seen, it was a custom in those days to do the fighting chiefly in the warmer seasons of the year. The year began along the middle of March.

"And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet."^g

The burial of men in those days was not in graves, as it is with us. Generally they were taken into caverns of the earth, and if there were not natural caverns, artificial ones were made wherever soil and rock in the hillsides permitted. Into the rocks a hole was dug large enough to permit a

^fII Kings 13:19, 20.

^gII Kings 13:21.

man's body to be held. These holes were called "loculi." In front of the hole a rock was placed. Sometimes alongside of the rock a place was hewed out large enough to receive the body of the man within the cave. The body in those days was wrapped in a cloth and in the course of time nothing was left of it but the bones. Such places are still seen in Palestine, and the bones of those buried in earlier times are numerous in certain parts.

There is in the Scriptures no exact parallel to this miracle. We read that in the days of Christ the woman was healed when she touched the hem of Christ's garment, and again in Acts that from the body of Paul, handkerchiefs and aprons were brought to the sick and the diseases departed from them. In the case of Elisha it was a dead object brought in contact with a dead object, so that the healing was not done by the power of faith in either—both were dead. The act was wholly within the purposes of Jehovah, to magnify His power and glory. Marvelous as it was, it had no effect upon the people who must have known the circumstances from those who witnessed the event.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Give an account of Jehu.
2. How did Joash become king of Judah?
3. Describe the events in the lives of Joash and Elisha.
4. Why was the fighting season confined to summer in those ancient days?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who were the Arameans?
2. What lesson is derived from the failure of Joash to smite the ground more than three times?

NOTE

Again Northern Israel touched its widest bounds. Pride and self-confidence took possession of the nation. The military nobles who rallied about the king, enriched by the spoils of war, enslaved their fellow-countrymen whose fortunes had been depleted by the disastrous Aramean wars. Outwardly Northern Israel seemed strong and prosperous, but within were social wrongs which were eating the very vitals of the nation.

CHAPTER 16

JONAH AND HIS TIMES

(II Kings 14; Jonah)

A blessed opportunity—the privilege of correcting one's mistakes.

When Jeroboam II reigned in the kingdom of Israel new dangers began their approach. There were also in his times growing contentions and wars between these two kingdoms which for so many years had remained friendly, though separated. When Rehoboam undertook to bring the ten tribes under subjection he was stopped by the word of the Lord, who informed him that this division was for His own purpose and brought about by Him. There were occasional alliances between the two kingdoms, but they never came under one rule.

Extension of the Kingdom. Jeroboam II ruled over Israel for forty-one years. The most important event perhaps in his reign was the appearance of Jonah, whose biography in the Book of Kings is confined to a single paragraph describing the extent to which the king had extended his domain far north beyond Damascus to Hamath. He also recovered Damascus, which had been taken once in the days of David.

“He restored the coast of Israel, from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he

spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher."^a

This extension of the kingdom of Israel to its farthest limits naturally led to wars with the Syrians. As they possessed a fertile country covering all that part of the land from Damascus north to the boundary of Asia Minor it would naturally attract the Syrians and the Babylonians of the Mesopotamia when they grew strong enough to go in search of new lands and new conquests. We are now coming in sight of the great nations of Mesopotamia, with whom Israel hereafter had much to do.

Introduction to Jonah. As the story of Jonah is introduced at this point, it may be given here according to the contents of the book bearing his name. The period in history assigned to him is 782-745 B. C. The prophet is commanded by the Lord to go down to the city of Nineveh, a city of the Syrians located on the river Tigris in Mesopotamia. The prophet fears that the Lord will repent and not destroy the people of Nineveh according to his words, and therefore seeks to escape by going down to Jaffa on the coast of the Mediterranean and taking a ship for Tarshish.

The city of Tarshish is believed to have been a Phoenician city located in the southwestern part of Spain. A violent storm arose, and the people prayed to their gods for relief but found no help in them. They concluded that someone must be

^aII Kings 14:25.

aboard who was really responsible for their misfortunes, and they searched out Jonah, whom they found asleep. They cast lots to discover whose presence was bringing upon them such distress and the lot fell on Jonah. He acknowledged his guilt and asked that they cast him over into the sea. Before doing this, however, they made an unsuccessful attempt to row the vessel to land.

When they found their efforts futile, they threw Jonah overboard and the storm abated and the heathens had reason to adore the God of the Hebrews. Jonah was swallowed up by a fish that was prepared for the purpose by the Lord. He remained in its belly three days and nights where he offered prayers. He was then cast up on land by the fish after which he was commanded to perform his neglected mission to Nineveh. He made his way immediately to his destination.

People Repent. When the prophet, however, began to declare that the city should be destroyed within forty days, the people repented, believed in God, proclaimed a fast, and put on themselves sackcloth and ashes that they might escape the punishments which the prophet had declared would come upon them. Such a condition in the heathen world is remarkable, as the kingdom of Israel, from which Jonah came, had never manifested such a spirit of repentance nor such a disposition to observe the words of a prophet.

“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that

he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.”^b

This Jonah did not appreciate. He was angry, and said to the Lord: “Was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.”^c

Jonah now, like Elijah in the desert, wanted to die.

“So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

“And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

“But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

“And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

“And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? and he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

^bJonah 3:10.

^cJonah 4:2.

“Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

“And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”^d

Views on Story of Jonah. What shall we think of the story of Jonah? Modern writers are greatly divided. Some accept it as historical; some think that it is mythological. Some think, and this is the teaching of the Catholic church, that Jonah wrote it; others think that it was written by someone else. Josephus, in his day, disowned the word about the repentance of the Ninevites or God's remonstrances with Jonah. Josephus was a Pharisee and believed fervently that God could hardly love anyone but an Israelite.

Cheyne, a great English author, treats the book as an allegory. The name Jonah is the Hebrew word for “dove” which this writer takes to mean Israel. The prophet himself stands for Israel, which was to prophesy among the nations. The sea is taken as a figure of speech that was to portray the fall of Israel. The fish, according to him, refers to Babylon, which swallowed up Israel, not to destroy Israel, but to give Israel a chance to repent, as Jonah did in the belly of the whale.

The story of Jonah teaches a number of beautiful

^dJonah 4:5-11.

truths, and it is much less important from its historical standpoint than from the divine wisdom which it contains. To Jonah was given in his day a revelation that many do not even appreciate now,—that God is the father of all living, and that He is merciful to all, though He has a chosen people.

It further teaches the patience of God toward those whose anger and wrong-doing are the result of their lack of understanding. Jonah's heart may have been right enough, but his conception of what God ought to do to the Ninevites was wrong, and therefore the Lord patiently taught him by the growth of the gourd and its death, over which the prophet mourned. Jesus Himself makes use of Jonah in describing His descent into the world of departed spirits.

Advent of the Assyrians. About this time, Pul, the king of the Assyrians, came to the kingdom of Israel. As the Assyrians grew in strength they overran the country of Assyria to Damascus, where they would naturally learn about the Israelites and their possessions. The king of the Ten Tribes was ready to buy off the Assyrians, which he did by the payment of large sums of money. As wars in those times were raids made for the purpose of obtaining booty, the armies were more in the nature of robbers.

This is the first mention we have of Assyria making an inroad as an aggressive power into the Land of Promise. During this time assassinations brought about rapid changes in the kings of Israel.

They become now too numerous even to mention, until finally in the days of Pekah, king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, entered the land, captured a number of cities, and carried away captives from them and from Galilee generally.

The days of Israel's destruction were rapidly advancing. Her kings had been almost universally bad. At the close of the reign of each of them, it was the same story, "he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin."

"And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and smote him and slew him, and reigned in his stead, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah."^e

A Comparison Between Israel and Judah. It would be quite natural that the people of Judah would hold themselves aloof from alliance with the kingdom of Israel, whose wickedness and whose disloyal kings were in striking contrast to the kings of Judah, who obeyed more humbly the words of the prophets. Judah therefore felt their superior favor with Jehovah, and naturally became more or less contemptuous towards their apostate brethren in the kingdom of the north. From now on we may designate the tribe of Judah as the Jews, though into their nation the tribe of Benjamin is taken, and they no doubt absorb many of the tribe of Simeon, whose home was south of Judah's.

^eII Kings 15:30.

The kingdom of the north, however, when the people began to see the dangers that they were likely to suffer from the inroads made by the Assyrians, sought an alliance with their neighbors the Syrians. Into this alliance they sought to draw the Jews. The recent invasions of Pul and Tiglath-pileser alarmed the kings of Israel and Syria. They were anxious that the House of David should be included in their alliance. They therefore formed a plan to transfer the crown of the Jews to Ben-tabal, who was no doubt a refugee in one of their courts at this time. Nothing, however, came of this scheme, and the dangers of an alliance between Israel and Judah called forth the warnings of God through denunciation by his prophets.

Isaiah, perhaps the greatest of all Jewish prophets of the later period, now appears on the horizon of Jewish history, and we shall have occasion to notice his words and history a little later on.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Relate the story of Jonah.
2. Who were the Syrians?
3. Who were the people of Nineveh?
4. Who were the Assyrians?
5. What great prophet appeared about this time in the history of Israel?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What influences were strongest in keeping the kingdoms of Israel and Judah apart?
2. What were the racial relations between the Hebrews and the people of Nineveh?

NOTE

What most stands in the way of the performance of duty is irresolution, weakness of purpose, and indecision. On the one side are conscience and the knowledge of good and evil; on the other are indolence, selfishness, love of pleasure, or passion. The weak and ill-disciplined will may remain suspended for a time between these influences; but at length the balance inclines one way or the other, according as the will is called into action or otherwise. If it be allowed to remain passive, the lower influence of selfishness or passion will prevail; and thus manhood suffers abdication, individuality is renounced, character is degraded. It was a noble saying of Pompey, when his friends tried to dissuade him from embarking for Rome in a storm, telling him that he did so at the great peril of his life: "It is necessary for me to go," he said; "it is not necessary for me to live." What it was right that he should do, he would do, in the face of danger and in defiance of storms.—S. Smiles.

CHAPTER 17

JUDAH—AMAZIAH—AHAZ

(II Chronicles 25-28)

Extremes of fortune are true wisdom's test,
And he's of men most wise who bears them best.

Going back a brief period, we take up again the history of Judah in the time of Amaziah, who reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. He took a census of the people throughout all Judah and Benjamin. Here we have an evidence of Benjamin's inclusion in the tribe of Judah. And they brought 300,000 choice men over whom he appointed captains of thousands and captains of hundreds in order that he might go up against the Edomites to the east of the Holy Land; and to be sure of victory, he hired a hundred thousand out of the kingdom of Israel.

"But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the Lord is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim. * * *

"And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."^a

^aII Chron. 25:7, 9.

In his battle with the Edomites Amaziah was successful, but on his return from victory, he brought with him the gods of the children of Seir, a mountain in which the Edomites dwelt, and he worshiped these gods and burned incense to them. This act brought upon him divine displeasure; but his success through divine aid made him boastful, and he challenged the Israelites to war. His challenge was accepted, and the Israelites defeated Judah. They broke down the walls of the city of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits, or six hundred feet, and after the king of Israel had gathered up all the gold and silver and the vessels that were in the house of God, he returned to his capital city of Samaria.

Uzziah. Amaziah, king of Judah, was put to death by those who conspired against him. He was succeeded by his son Uzziah who, in the beginning of his reign, gave great promise of a righteous rule in Judah.

“And he built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains; husbandmen also, and vinedressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry.”^b

He had a host of fighting men whom he equipped and made a powerful army.

“And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal

^bII Chron. 26:10.

And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong.”^c

Read the lesson of his pride and downfall in the following verses:

“But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense.

“And Azariah the priest went after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men:

“And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God.”^d

Such pointed talk from the priests shows the indignation that they felt, and the gross insult to Jehovah when the king undertook to officiate in the holy place instead of those whom God had appointed to that duty. Such talk from the priests excited the anger of the king, whose resentment brought upon him the curse of God: “the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord from beside the incense altar.”^e

This settled the king’s doom: the priests at once

^cII Chron. 26:15.

^dII Chron. 26:16-18.

^eII Chron. 26:19.

put him out of the temple as an unclean man, and the king himself seeing the curse that had come upon him, withdrew, and he was taken out of the city where he lived in an isolated house provided for those who suffered from the unclean disease, leprosy. His burial place was in the field of the kings, but not in their tombs; as a leper he must be buried separately. As in life, he could not mingle with others, so in death there must be no contact with others.

“Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write.”^f

As Isaiah lived well on into the reign of Hezekiah, a great grandson of Uzziah, he can hardly have been contemporary with Uzziah as a grown-up man, unless it be for a short period of time at the close of the king's reign. This is the first announcement of Isaiah, a great prophet whose history in Israel commands a high place.

Jotham. Jotham, the son of Uzziah, reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years.

“And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the Lord.”^g

The lesson of his father could not be so quickly ignored, and the son recognized more than his father the divine authority which belonged to the prophets of Judah. The reign of Jotham was not

^fII Chron. 26:22.

^gII Chron. 27:2.

important. He defeated the Ammonites in war and they paid him tribute of wheat and barley. The Ammonites lived in Moab beyond the Jordan, the land that has been famous for its generous production of different kinds of grain. He was succeeded by his son Ahaz, who was at the time of his father's death twenty years old, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years: "but he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father."^h

King Ahaz was the worst of all the kings of Judah from David down. He established Moloch in the valley of Hinnom, which is just below the walls of Jerusalem on the west. The worship of this god is not mentioned since the days of Solomon. Moloch was the principal god of the Ammonites, who, that they might succeed, offered up their first-born sons to this god of fire. Ahaz offered his own sons likewise to the god of fire and abandoned the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

His wickedness brought trouble upon him. His enemies from all sides began to close in on Jerusalem. Rezin, king of Damascus, formed an alliance with Pekah, king of Israel, in the north; the Philistines oppressed him from the southwest, and from the southeast fought against him. The alliance of the Assyrians proved too great for Ahaz, and these kings entered the city of Jerusalem, and took from Judah a large number of prisoners.

The Prophet Oded. The king of Israel proposed

^hII Chron. 28:1.

to bring these prisoners to Samaria and make out of them bondsmen. However, there appeared the prophet Oded, one of the leading men of Samaria, and reminded them that such a cruel act would bring upon them the punishment of God. He also reminded them that although Judah may have strayed from the paths of correct worship, the people of Israel were in no better position themselves. His warning was heeded, and the prisoners of Judah were not sent back to Jerusalem, but down to Jericho. Just why this was done we are not told.

In the midst of these great catastrophies to Judah, their king sent away east in the valley of the Mesopotamia to King Tiglath-pileser for help. This was a most dangerous thing to do, as it so proved by later results. Judah could not very well get aid from Egypt, because at this time Egypt was in a weakened condition. The Assyrians were called to bring the country immediately north of Palestine, known as Syria, under Israel's control. The Assyrian king therefore took Damascus and captured the king, Rezin, and later his son, and took many prisoners captive away down into the southeastern part of Assyria to a place called Elam in the southwest part of the valley of the two rivers. It is not at all unlikely that at this time a considerable number of Israelites from beyond the Jordan were also among the prisoners.

While Tiglath-pileser was at Damascus, King Ahaz went to visit him. As the Assyrians were growing in power and extending their conquests

rapidly to the west, it was only a question of time when their greed of empire would lead them to seize the people of Palestine; although the king of Judah had formed a temporary alliance with the Assyrians, an alliance which in time led to the capture of the Ten Tribes, it would naturally be only a question of time when the kingdoms of the Mesopotamia would find some excuse for swallowing up the kingdom of Judah.

Ahaz Desecrates the Temple. While the king of Judah was at Damascus to visit the king of the Assyrians there, he saw an altar which evidently interested him greatly. Whether he cared for the worship of the new gods of Assyria or not, Assyria was growing so powerful that the worship of its gods might at any rate become attractive to his people. We know from history that the altars became with the Assyrians in their conquests of other nations the altars on which those conquered were required to make sacrifices to the gods of the conquerer. Sometimes the Assyrians erected temples of worship in the lands of the people brought under their rule.

It is a little difficult for us perhaps to understand at this period of time the great effect that the worship of these idols of antiquity had upon the people. About them centered their loyalty; they believed in the assistance that came from unseen forces, and in their efforts to account for the unseen power, they established a form of worship which they represented in idols.

The Israelites had taught the nations around them the force of unseen powers which operated in their behalf. But the great things which Israel did through the aid of Jehovah did not bring other nations to the worship of Israel's God. The great things done in Israel by the power of God created in other nations a rivalry, and when the Israelites were punished by the neighboring nations for their wickedness, their neighbors took their victories over Israel as an evidence of the superior power of their gods over Jehovah.

Worship of Power. As the nations about Israel and Judah in the days of their wickedness were growing more and more powerful, there were no doubt many people both in Samaria and Jerusalem who believed that the idols of Syria and Assyria were superior to Jehovah as aids in battle. They came in those days to look upon the value of their gods from the standpoint of victory. It was then, not the worship of goodness, purity, and right, but a worship of power. We are not, even in our own day, without reverence for persons and things that to us seem most powerful.

Ahaz was impressed by the superior power of the Assyrians. The new altar, therefore, he put in place of the former brazen altar that stood immediately in front of the porch of the temple. He removed the font or sea from off the twelve brazen oxen, and finally closed the temple to the worship of Jehovah.

The king of Assyria was disposed now to favor Judah as an ally; and as he had made war upon the

kingdom of Israel, it was natural that when the two kingdoms should be overthrown, their overthrow should take place separately, as God intended it should. Israel and Judah were not, according to His purposes, to go into bondage together. They were required to remain separate throughout all their history to the time when both, in the last dispensation, should be brought together, and their redemption is to belong to the Second Coming of the Son of God.

The historical position at this period was such that the temporary friendship of the king of Israel for Judah saved that king when the people of the kingdom of Israel were taken by the Assyrians into bondage. Judah was certain in time to bring on its own overthrow. Such conduct as that of which Ahaz was guilty would lead to rejection on the part of Jehovah. Isaiah, who now comes on the scene, says that "Judah was growing weary of the house of David."

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Give an account of Amaziah's reign.
2. Who were the Edomites?
3. Give an account of the reign of king Uzziah.
4. Give an account of the reign of king Ahaz.
5. What brought the Assyrians to Palestine?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What part did the city of Damascus play in the history of Israel?
2. What has always been the rivalry between the worship of power and the worship of the good and true?

NOTE

Ancient Israel in dire extremity sought relief in political alliances. They vainly believed that a persecutor, if propitiated, might become a protector. They looked around for help, and not upward. They would substitute the wisdom of the age for God's guidance. Against political salvation Isaiah warned the people.—Author.

CHAPTER 18

THE DOWNFALL OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

(II Kings 17; Hosea, Amos, Micah)

We fancy we suffer from ingratitude, while in reality we suffer from self-love.

While things were going on so badly in Judah, and during the twelfth year of the reign of King Ahaz, King Hoshea began his reign of nine years in Samaria.

“And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him.”^a

Repentance for Israel was evidently too late, and though this last king may have been much better than his predecessors, into the lives of his people idolatry had been so instilled that the nation was poisoned through and through by it. Repentance in nations is like repentance in the individual: it becomes almost impossible after generations of sin. If there had been any saving salt in the kingdom of Israel, God would undoubtedly have spared the nation, as He was willing to do in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. His judgment of Israel and the destruction of the kingdom must be final as it must be just.

Israel Carried Away. Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, had brought the northern kingdom under

^aII Kings 17:2.

subjection, and Hoshea was under tribute to the Assyrian king. Hoshea, however, did not long submit to this bondage without an effort to throw it off. He therefore sent his messengers to So, the king of Egypt, and ceased bringing his present to Assyria. This was revolt against his master, and it is said the king of Assyria shut Hoshea up "and bound him in prison." It is not said that the Assyrian king who thus overthrew the northern kingdom was Shalmaneser, and historians generally believe that it was King Sargon. At any rate this king claims to have taken Samaria in 721 B. C.

"In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes."^b

This destroyed the kingdom of the north. At first it is said that only 27,280 prisoners were taken, but historians generally believe that all the inhabitants were taken into the country of the Mesopotamia. It was a practice of Sargon to shift populations about. In the land of the Israelites he settled Arabs.

"And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof."^c

The new population of Samaria, as the country

^bII Kings 17:6.

^cII Kings 17:24.

of the northern kingdom now came to be called, brought with them the idolatry of the tribes to which they belonged. They set up images, worshiped in the groves and on the high hills, and indulged in many pagan practices.

Remnant of Israel. This cleaning out of the population of Israel was not complete, and we afterward read there of a "remnant of Israel." And among the new population the Lord sent lions that slew some of the people.

"Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land."^d

They therefore sent finally to the priests of Israel who might teach them how to worship Jehovah. One of the priests came, by order of the king, and settled in Beth-el. The people, however, while they feared the Lord, set up their own priests in the high places and sacrificed to their idols; or, as the Bible puts it:

"They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence."^e

There is a small remnant in the old town of Shechem today that claim to be descendants of

^dII Kings 17:26.

^eII Kings 17:33.

those brought up from Assyria to inhabit the land left desolate when Israel was carried away into bondage. They come later on into frequent mention in the Bible. Much has been written about these people who were brought into Samaria, by the Jews who hated them, and would have nothing to do with them. The Jews refused every advancement that these Samaritans made to come into friendly relations and to worship with the Jews, although the Samaritans claimed in the course of time to be followers of Jehovah.

Babylonian Religion. From the account that we have of the Babylonians and of their religious system, we learn that they did not use very extensively the images of animals in their forms of worship. Their gods were rather those of nature. They represented the male sun either by a circle, a plane or a cross. The female sun was represented by an eight-rayed star. The god of the atmosphere was represented by a double or triple thunder-bolt, and in a general way their gods were represented in human form. All in all, it may perhaps be said that the worship of the Babylonians was at this time not so degrading as the worship of the nations which surrounded ancient Israel. In time these newcomers, which now came to be known as the Samaritans, adopted the Five Books of Moses, and they erected on Mount Gerizim a temple. They also laid aside their idolatrous ceremonies and admitted the binding authority of the Pentateuch.

The Ten Tribes. At the downfall of ancient

Israel, the Ten Tribes disappear. It is asked if, as a people, they were kept intact. Prophecy and modern revelation affirm that they were. What became of them? We look for the return of the Ten Tribes. But where have they been all these centuries? Where are they now?

Some claim that they have been discovered in Malabar; others say they are in Cashmere, in China. Some locate them in Turkistan; some say they are in the Kerbish mountains; others say they are still in Arabia; while some writers locate them in Germany and others in North America. Many books have been written on the subject. There are those who contend that a considerable number of them returned with the Jews, who later on spent seventy years in captivity in Babylon. Josephus in the first century says that they then still existed beyond the Euphrates,—that was the tradition of his day.

We believe that a part at least of the tribe of Ephraim was scattered throughout northern Europe, whose blood, mingled with the blood of the Gentiles, has been pronounced in their acceptance of the faith as taught by the Latter-day Saints. The subject of the abode of the Ten Tribes and their restoration in the last days does not properly come within our discussion of Old Testament history.

Prophet Hosea. In this latter period the prophet Hosea appears and makes reference to the proclivities of King Hoshea toward the Egyptians. Hosea is the only one whose writings have sur-

vived, and who was himself born in the northern kingdom. He appeared in the kingdom about 746 to 735 B. C. Neither his name, however, nor his history appears in either Chronicles or Kings, and all that we know of him is confined to the book which bears his name.

And the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord."^f

"So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim." It was really a command to the prophet to take a woman who would bestow her love upon others; and his own individual experience in which he was made to feel a wife's unfaithfulness was a reminder to him that Israel had likewise been unfaithful to Jehovah.

A few extracts from the writings of this prophet must suffice. He emphasizes the leading position which Ephraim took among the Ten Tribes. Throughout all the history of God's chosen people the position occupied by Judah and by Ephraim is foremost in the history of Israel.

"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."^g

Of Ephraim's scattering he says:

^fHosea 1:2.

^gHosea 6:4.

“Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned.”^h

Again,

“My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations.”ⁱ

The Prophet concludes with a beautiful eulogy upon Israel:

“I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. * *

“Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him. I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.

“Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.”^j

Amos. At this time there appears also the prophet Amos who, though born in the kingdom of Judah, had a message for the people of the north. The period assigned to him is from 775 to 750 B. C. This prophet predicts the calamities of the Syrians, who, for nearly a hundred years, had greatly harassed the kingdom, and had taken away the two and a half tribes beyond the Jordan.

The words of Amos tell of the moral life of the children of Israel. He gives us a very dark picture of the moral anarchy of his day. He calls attention

^hHosea 7:8.

ⁱHosea 9:17.

^jHosea 14:9.

to the fact that God does not delight in the sacrifices of the people, who were going in great numbers to the temple, without improving the conduct of their daily lives. He denounces the rich who live idle lives, who are lazy and pampered, and the women he calls the "kine of Bashon." Justice is vanished, and the weak are oppressed by the strong; robbery, bribery, and the carping sins of the age prevail in Israel; weights were falsified and foods adulterated. (Note.)

Amos pronounces against the gods of the heathens, and preaches that Jehovah's power is universal, that He is not only the God of His chosen people, but that He is ruler of all the world. Amos shows that although Israel is God's favorite people, because of that divine favor the people had additional and heavier responsibilities, and points out to them the so-called "Day of the Lord," a time when God's punishment would fall upon them. This prophet makes use of Scripture with which missionaries of the Latter-day Saints have made themselves familiar:

"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."^k

"Behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand.

"And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst

^kAmos 3:7.

of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more."^l

That this prophèt did not belong to the school of the prophets, and was not like many of the false prophets which had arisen before him, he declared to Amaziah of Bethel,

"I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit."^m

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."ⁿ

Of the restoration of Israel, God manifested His loving designs:

"And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them.

"And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God."^o

Micah. A part of Micah's prophecies refer to the destruction of Samaria, which took place 722 B. C. Most of his predictions, however, fell about 705 to 701. Micah, like his predecessors, Hosea and Amos, represented God as a righteous being who

^lAmos 7:8.

^mAmos 7:14.

ⁿAmos 8:11.

^oAmos 9:14, 15.

cared more for the good deeds of the people than their efforts to appease him by sacrifices. The ancients who did not belong to the house of Israel, as heretofore stated, did not treat religion in the light of morals. Their gods were renowned rather for their strength, their power, and their helpfulness than for their goodness or virtue.

“The word of the Lord that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.”^p

Concerning Samaria and Jerusalem he said,

“What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem?”^q

“Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand.

“And they cover fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage.”^r

Micah condemns the rich for their gross injustice to the poor. Class distinction in those days must have been very great. Men's avarice manifested itself treacherously by the manner in which they dealt with those whom they had the power to oppress. Micah also condemns false prophets, who

^pMicah 1:1.

^qMicah 1:5.

^rMicah 2:1, 2.

in that age had become numerous, and who were willing to prostitute their divine gifts for hire.

“Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. * * *

“Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God. * * *

“The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us.”^s

Foretells the Gathering. In the visions of future glory, and of the gathering of the last days, Micah sends forth this beautiful declaration, so often quoted by the elders of Israel:

“But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

“And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

“And he shall judge among many people, and re-

^sMicah 3:5, 7, 11.

buke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

“But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.”

This great prophet further declares the coming of the Messiah:

“But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”^u

In the days of Hezekiah there was a reformation, to all outward appearances, but it evidently did not come from the heart. Sacrifices were re-established, and the high places cast down, but God did not find pleasure in the manner of the worship of the people:

“Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”^v

^tMicah 4:1-4.

^uMicah 5:2.

^vMicah 6:7, 8.

Micah, like the great prophets that had written before him, closes the book in a glorious tribute to God:

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

“He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

“Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.”^w

The language of these prophetic utterances is among the sublimest in Holy Writ. In the background of fal'en Israel may be seen the reasons for the call of such men. Their warnings were more than solemn. Their promises were heavenly assurances. But the movement of the people downward had become so rapid that they went heedlessly to the evil judgment which God pronounced against them in case they would not repent.

A careful reading of the prophets will amply compensate the student, who may learn from them not only the sublimest literature of the Bible, but the spirit of the times in which they wrote. Their words often unlock the secret thoughts of the human soul in its longings after God.

^wMicah 7:18-20.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who led the people of the kingdom of Israel into bondage?
2. Who occupied the cities made vacant of the Assyrian captivity?
3. What became of the Ten Tribes?
4. Who was Hosea?
5. Give an account of Amos.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the teachings of the Latter-day Saints respecting the union of Ephraim and Judah in the last days?
2. Who constituted the school of the prophets?

NOTE

1. For in the spiritual world alone lies the remedy for the inequalities and injustices of this. The eternal principle of righteousness, "Seek ye me, and ye shall live," to which, as the Rabbis said, Amos reduced the 612 commands of the Mosaic law, is after all the only true solution of all social problems.

The business of the government, according to a certain school of politicians, is concerned only with the material interests of the nation. "Laws," it is said, "cannot make the people moral, and the nation being an end to itself its relation to other nations is not subject to moral criteria." "We are legislators, not moralists," was the position taken by a statesman in a recent parliamentary debate. Those who engage in the business of governing the nation are, according to this view, concerned only to secure comfort, wealth and power. They have no need to ask whether a law will raise or lower the moral standard, or whether a policy is likely to increase peace and goodwill in the world. Their one object is material advantage, and their best guide is the business instinct which foresees the gain and loss of different courses. They have to do with profit and not with morals. "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind" is their motto.

CHAPTER 19

HEZEKIAH

(II Kings 18 and 19, II Chron. 18, 19, 29, 30, 31, 32)

How can a people be free that has not learned to be just?—Abbe Sieyes.

War Upon Idolatry. Before the Ten Tribes had been carried away into captivity and during the third year of the reign of Hoshea, Hezekiah began his reign at Jerusalem. Though the people of Judah in the early division of the kingdoms maintained a much higher order of worship and kept themselves much freer from idolatry than did the Ten Tribes, yet as time went on the spirit of idolatry around them fastened itself upon their lives. When Hezekiah began his reign, he did so by making war upon idolatry.

“He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.”^a

Worship in the high places was one of the complaints which the prophets of ancient Israel alleged against the people. Even when worship was destroyed elsewhere, when the people were willing that their idols should be destroyed in their homes, in the valleys, in the forests, and by the streams, the worship in high places continued.

^aII Kings 18:4.

As has already been explained, Baal was not one distinct god, but represented the spirits that remained, according to popular superstition, in the various places just mentioned. There was, however, in the mind of the ancient Israelites, very sacred memories of Sinai and the appearance of God on the mount. It is therefore not unlikely that in their efforts to worship God in high places, they had in mind the wonderful appearance of Jehovah to Moses on Mount Sinai; and however willing they may have been to give up the worship of idols of the groves and of the springs and other places, they would naturally hold tenaciously to the last in their worship on high places, where sanctuaries or altars were built.

Idoltrous Practices. In recent years exploration parties have uncovered a number of these high places of worship. Some remarkable discoveries have been made, especially at Gezer. Here they found a rock cemetery in which skeletons of young infants, said to be not more than a week old, were found deposited in jars. An ancient practice among the Canaanites, and imitated at times by the Israelites, was that of offering the first born children in sacrifice to idols. These high places had also degenerated so as to become places of immoral resort; and while in the beginning the Israelites may have undertaken to make their offerings at the high places in conformity with the law given in the Book of Deuteronomy, in time their worship in the high places became like that of the idolators.

When the temple of Solomon had been built, every excuse was removed for making sacrifices in the high places, and the people were forbidden to resort to their old practices. However, the customs of centuries had fixed themselves into the minds of the worshipers, and they turned naturally to idolatry, which was more in keeping with the fallen condition of man than the worship prescribed by God for man's exaltation in His commands to the people.

Here recurs the old emblem of the brass serpent for the first time since Moses set it up in the wilderness. Some suppose that it was left in the wilderness and transferred to Jerusalem by Ahaz. Others presume that it had always been preserved in the temple and had been brought by Solomon from Gibeah and placed in the temple among other treasures.

How extensively the Israelites burned incense to this brazen serpent we are not informed. As this is the first mention we have of such a practice, we may well believe that it had not become common. It was called "Nehushtan," which meant in Hebrew "brass thing." Although made in the form of a serpent, Nachash, the people did not mention it under that name, perhaps because of their abhorrence for the serpent itself.

The Temple Renovated. Hezekiah also renovated the temple which had been closed, and opened the door of the house of the Lord to the worship of the people. He gathered the priests and the Le-

vites and set them to work preparing the house of God and themselves for the worship which was prescribed by the Law of Moses. It is said that in their zeal the Levites were more devoted than the priests, although the priests stood above the Levites.

“And the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the Lord into the court of the house of the Lord. And the Levites took it, to carry it out abroad into the brook Kidron.”^b

According to the rule of worship in the temple the inner part here did not mean particularly the “holy of holies,” but the interior generally. The priests alone might enter into the temple buildings. The Levites were confined to the inner court. Thus the distinction between them. After all had been put in readiness the king gave orders that the daily morning sacrifice should be established upon the present altar in front of the porch of the temple.

It will be noticed in this reformation by Hezekiah that it was extended throughout all Israel. The northern kingdom was fast approaching its dissolution. At the time of Hezekiah this kingdom in the north was not an independent country. Hoshea was a subject of the king of Assyria. The people of the north, however, were not persuaded. Though the opportunity was given them to return to the worship of Jehovah through the reforma-

^bII Chron. 29:16.

tion, they preferred to keep their idolatrous practices.

Sennacherib. In the fourteenth year of the reign of Hezekiah, a new menace came to Judah. Sennacherib, whose father Sargon had carried away the people of Israel into captivity, appeared before the city of Jerusalem. This must have been soon after Sargon's death, which is given as 705 B. C. Sennacherib began his siege first against the fenced cities of Judah, which were taken by the Assyrians. Hezekiah did not feel himself in a position to oppose this powerful Assyrian monarch, and consented therefore to make himself a mere satrap to the king of Assyria, who required this Jewish king to pay three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

In order to make this large payment, the king was compelled to despoil the house of the Lord of its sacred metals. This mission of Hezekiah was not in harmony with the expressed wishes of Isaiah, who thought that the people and the king should trust in the Lord. Sennacherib, after over-running Syria, and the Phoenicians and the Philistines, and bringing Judah under subjection, returned to Nineveh, with great numbers of captives and immense quantities of spoil.

Alliance with Egypt. (Note.) Hezekiah felt no doubt, the humiliation that came about through his submission to the king of Assyria, and he began to look to an alliance with the king of Egypt for protection, and as an aid in throwing off the yoke

of the Assyrians. This he did contrary to the counsel of the prophet, who warned him that Egypt was but a broken reed, and that the king of Egypt could not be relied upon. Furthermore, it was a reliance upon the arm of flesh.

When the king of Assyria found out what was going on in Judah, he sent Tartan and other agents to Hezekiah, so that a new army now appeared before Jerusalem. In those days the king of Assyria, when all of Syria was brought under subjection, kept a large army along the banks of the Orontes River, something like two hundred miles north of Judah. From this point his armies could be sent in all directions to keep those whom he conquered in submission. When Hezekiah was thus again threatened, he sent messengers covered with sackcloth to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amos.

“And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me.

“Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.”

The Assyrian king sent to Hezekiah a letter of warning reminding him that other nations had fallen and that their gods had not been of any avail in protecting them.

^cII Kings 19:6, 7,

“And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.”^d

Assyrian Army Destroyed. These were trying hours for the soul of the king of Judah; he well knew the power of the Assyrians, and how the nations around him had fallen hopelessly before the armies of Sennacherib. But the Lord would yet humble the heathen and give to the nations about Judah a fresh and convincing evidence of His great power over His chosen people. The king of Assyria had reproached the Lord, and lifted up his voice in contempt of the “Holy One of Israel.” Another message came from Sennacherib in no uncertain words:

“Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.”^e

Putting a hook in the nose and a bridle in the lips was one of those cruel methods by which the kings of ancient Assyria and Babylon were wont to lead about their distinguished prisoners. Speaking of Jerusalem the Lord said:

“For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.

“And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of

^dII Kings 19:14.

^eII Kings 19:28.

the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.

“So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.”^f

The annals of his kingdom show that he warred with other nations, but did not again in his life time invade or threaten Jerusalem. At this time Nineveh appears to be the capital of Assyria.

“And it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.”^g

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain the worship of Baal.
2. Explain worship in the high places.
3. What were the reformations of Hezekiah?
4. Give an account of Sennacherib.
5. What was the end of Sennacherib?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How did Isaiah regard Hezekiah's effort to save himself by entering into political machinations with the Egyptians?
2. What impressions do the miracles of this age produce upon you?

NOTE

Egypt had a great reputation, and was a mighty promiser. Her brilliant antiquity had given her a habit of generous promise, and dazzled other nations into trusting her. Indeed, so full were Egyptian politics of bluster and big language that the Hebrews had a nickname for Egypt. They called her

^fII Kings 19:34-36.

^gII Kings 19:37.

Rahab—Stormy-speech, Blusterer, Braggart. It was the term also for the crocodile, as being a monster, so that there was a picturesqueness as well as moral aptness in the name. Ay, says Isaiah, catching at the old name and putting to it another which describes Egyptian helplessness and inactivity, I call her Rahab Sit-still, Braggart-that-sitteth-still, Stormy-speech, Stay-at-home. Blustering and inactivity, blustering and sitting still, that is her character; for Egypt helpeth in vain and to no purpose. Isaiah tracks the bad politics to their source in bad religion, the Egyptian policy to its roots in the prevailing tempers of the people. The Egyptian policy was doubly stamped. It was disobedience to the word of God; it was satisfaction with falsehood. The statesmen of Judah shut their ears to God's spoken word; they allowed themselves to be duped by the Egyptian Pretense.—G. A. Smith.

CHAPTER 20

DEATH OF HEZEKIAH

(II Kings 20-21, II Chron. 32-33)

The greatest prayer is patience.—Buddha.

Hezekiah's Life Prolonged. After the delivery of Jerusalem from its threatened destruction by the Assyrians, Hezekiah became sick unto death. Furthermore, the prophet Isaiah made the announcement to him that he should set his house in order, for he must die. Death to Hezekiah was a great calamity, as he viewed his situation. He went into the house of the Lord and turning his face to the wall, implored Jehovah that he might yet be spared a while. He said,

“I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.”^a

One of the blessings of devotion to God was the promise of a long life. The king at this time must have been in middle life, and he was not ready to go. He had witnessed God's power in the destruction of the Assyrians, and that undoubtedly gave him a new heart. Then there was the absence of sons to take his place, so that all in all he was grief stricken. Isaiah had just made the announcement that he shou'd die, and before he left the middle

^aII Kings 20:3,

court the word of the Lord came to him that he should return and tell Hezekiah that his prayer had been heard.

“Behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord.

“And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.

“And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. * *

“And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?”^b

Just what kind of instrument this was for recording time we do not know. According to history, the sun dial proper was invented by the Babylonians before the time of Herodotus.

Hezekiah’s Mistake. Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, having learned of the sickness of Hezekiah, sent messengers with presents to the Jewish king. The heart of the king was no doubt flattered, and he showed all the precious things of his house, its gold and silver and spices and treasures to these strange messengers. When Isaiah learned what Hezekiah had done, he said:

“Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in

^bII Kings 20:5, 6, 7, 9.

store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord.

“And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”^c

That does not seem to have troubled very greatly the king, who thought that the word of the Lord had in it the consolation that it would not happen in his days. One is led to wonder, in view of his prophecy, whether the answer of the Lord, who promised Hezekiah fifteen years more of life, was, after all, a blessing. The good king Hezekiah died, and was buried in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honor at his death. (Note.)

The Apostasy of Manasseh. “Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem.”^d

It is remarkable how easily and how quickly the people were turned from good to evil ways. The reformation of Judah under Hezekiah was not heart-felt and pronounced. It was not very sincere repentance. They were easily and quickly turned by his unworthy son Manasseh. The fickle tendency of the people shown in this change indicates their unstable character; they were not dependable. A repentance that could not last a single gen-

^cII Kings 20:17, 18.

^dII Kings 21:1.

eration in a nation could not serve the purposes of God. The situation was full of forebodings, and thoughtful men and godly men dreaded the evil day. The curse pronounced upon the final apostasy of the nation was a most terrible one.

In the midst of the great dangers now hovering over Israel there appeared three of Israel's greatest prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. God gave His people the best help He could afford them: He held out to them the possibilities of escape; they were still His people, and He was their God. If they would in their perverseness go through the "valley of the shadow of death," God would be at its remotest bounds yet to deliver them. Manasseh "built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord."^e

"And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger."^f

Making his son to pass through the fire was the worship of that element by offering up as a sacrifice to it his own children. He "observed times" it is said, a thing that was forbidden in the law:

"There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch."^g

^eII Chron. 33:5.

^fII Kings 21:6.

^gDeut. 18:10.

That was a kind of divination practiced by the ancient Canaanitish nations. It consisted in predictions made from certain positions of the clouds and the state of the atmosphere. Manasseh's dealings with familiar spirits are perhaps best illustrated in Saul's visit to the witch of En-dor; and the wizards with which the king dealt had familiar spirits, and were a kind of necromancers. Isaiah says they "peep" and "mutter."

This apostate king was not content to go out and worship in the groves as the heathen did; but he put one of the images in the very temple itself, which was later taken out and destroyed by Josiah.

The Israelites were still promised that they would not be compelled to leave the land which God gave to their fathers if they would only do according to the Law of Moses.

"But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel.

"And the Lord spake by His servants the prophets, saying,

"Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols:

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle.

"And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of

Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.”^h

Two Extremes. Ancient Israel represented the the two extremes. They might devote themselves to God as no other nation could or would do, but when they apostatized from His ways their evils were more abominable than the nations that knew not the light. They had the greatest powers for good; they were God’s chosen people; they should inherit the earth; or they might forfeit their inheritance, choose evil in the place of good, and abandon themselves to the power of Satan; there was no half-way place for them in the purposes of Jehovah.

Through some of the writings of the prophets, we learn that the worship of the heavenly bodies was so fostered that the people erected altars on the roof of almost every house. They offered cakes in the street to Estarte. Children were sacrificed to the god of fire in the valley of the Hinnon; it became as common to swear by Molech as it was by Jehovah. The sins of the Sodomites polluted the people, and were practiced in the very neighborhood of the temple. The upper classes greatly oppressed the people at large; the prophets lost their high calling and prophesied in the name of Baal; the priests polluted the sanctuary and did violence to the law, and it is said that there could hardly be found in all Jerusalem one who “executed

^hII Kings 21:9-13.

judgment" or "sought the truth." Read on and there is more of it.

"Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; besides his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord."ⁱ

Steeped in Idolatry. As we come along down to the later periods in the history of Israel, Josephus begins to throw more light upon the history of the times. From his writings it appears that there were those in the days of Hezekiah who resented the reformation; who were so steeped in their idolatry that they could not forget nor forgive those under the good king who would wipe it out. When Manasseh gave them the opportunity to resent the reformers, they were anxious to put the latter to death. It was a reign of terror; prophets were called forth and put to death, day by day, as they had been the chief instrumentality of Hezekiah in bringing about the reformation of his day.

Those nobles who took the part of the priests, we are told, were thrown from the rocky cliffs of Jerusalem. Tradition has it that Isaiah was among those to perish in those evil days. Manasseh was certainly a persecutor, and it was well said of him that he filled Jerusalem with blood from one end to another. There was not much to hope for such a people and for those who welcomed and sus-

ⁱII Kings 21:16 -

tained the administration of such a king as Manasseh. The king, however, further misguided the people by telling them that he could keep them secure by strengthening the walls around the city. On the north, it is said that he built an entirely new wall; he completed certain fortifications that had been begun. He also fortified many of the cities of Judea and placed them under experienced leaders.

In the temple, where the ark of God had been placed, there ceased to be room for it after he had placed his grove there. He destroyed, it is said, all the copies of the law that could be found, so that later on when a copy of it was really brought out it was an occasion for great joy.

His reign was a long category of awful crimes. From many of them there was no escape, because they were committed in contempt of God and His holy ordinances. The king mocked at the sacred things of Jehovah and put to death those who were not in sympathy with his conduct. He named one of his sons Amon after the Egyptian god in order to honor that people, with whom he wished to be on friendly terms, and in defiance of the warnings of the prophet Isaiah.

Amon. After Manasseh "slept with his fathers," Amon, his son, reigned two years in Jerusalem, and he also "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." His own servants conspired against him and slew him in his own home. Thereupon, the people rose up and slew the servants who had con-

spired against Amon, and they made his son, Josiah, king in his stead.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Give an account of the prolongation of the life of Hezekiah.
2. Give an account of Manasseh.
3. What was the idolatry of "observing times?"
4. Who was Amon?
5. What was the status of Jerusalem during the reign of Manasseh?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why did idolatry give such encouragement to sin?
2. Why are sinners prone to persecution?

NOTE

In direct contrast to his father, who had zealously favored everything Assyrian, Hezekiah gave himself passionately to whatever was national, and devoted his life to the restoration of the worship of Jehovah and the purification of the land from the heathenism which Ahaz had introduced. The "Law" was his guiding star in public and private. The prophets were his honored and cherished counselors. He was intelligent and refined as he was humble and godly. Jewish tradition, magnifying his fame and merits in after years, fancied that he must have been the promised Messiah; and the inspired compiler of the Second Book of Kings only reflects the universal homage of contemporary public opinion in the grand eulogium, that "he trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him."—Geikie.

CHAPTER 21

JOSIAH

(II Kings 22-23, II Chron. 34-35-36)

The soul is strong that trusts in goodness.
—Massinger.

According to the Bible, Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign. As Amon, his father, was twenty-four years old at the time of his death, it would seem that he was married when he was about fifteen years of age. In eastern countries early marriages were celebrated very generally among the people, and it is still a custom in those lands to bring about the marriage of sons and daughters when they are still very young. These marriages are generally brought about by the intercession of parents, to whose wishes in the matter their children are generally subservient.

It is said that Josiah "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." The new king sent to the high priest with instructions that he take charge of the silver that was delivered by the people at the door of the tabernacle. Hilkiyah at this time was high priest, and continued to act in that capacity until the destruction of Jerusalem and the departure of the tribe of Judah into Babylonian captivity.

Book of the Law Discovered. Hilkiyah, while working in the temple, discovered the book of the

law, and gave it to Shaphan the scribe, who brought it to the king. As the scribe read the law to the king, the latter must have been very greatly impressed, as we are told that he rent his clothes. The king would naturally know from the reading of the law to what extent the people had departed from its requirements. Their apostasy from its sacred provisions would be made very clear to him as one by one the commandments of God contained in the law were read in his hearing. He therefore said:

“Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.”^a

Huldah. The high priest, Hilkiyah, and other messengers of the king, went to Huldah, the prophetess, the wife of Shallum; she “dwelt in Jerusalem, in the college.” And they communed with her. Huldah, like Miriam of old, and like Deborah, is styled a prophetess. Her reply in the name of the Lord was,

“Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah:

“Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke

^aII Kings 22:13.

me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched.”^b

To Josiah, however, the message came that because he had humbled himself before the Lord and wept as he rent his clothes, he should be permitted to be gathered unto the grave in peace. This message which the prophetess Huldah brought to the king, became afterwards a special message of Jeremiah, who thundered his condemnations upon the people because of their iniquities. Josiah’s eyes were not to see “all the evil” which was to be brought upon Jerusalem. (II Kings 22:20.) But he saw the beginning of it.

“And the archers shot at King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded.

“His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

“And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the lamentations.”^c

We are not informed that in the days of Josiah

^bII Chron. 34:24, 25.

^cII Chron. 35:23-25.

there was any open idolatry; perhaps no offering of human sacrifices to Molech, or worship in the high places. The reformation, however, does not seem to have been deep seated, for Jeremiah says, "Judah did not return to God with her whole heart, but feignedly."^d

The war in which Josiah lost his life was one that was waged between the tribe of Judah and the Egyptians. Josiah's reign was moreover celebrated for the great passover, the like of which had not been kept since the days of Samuel the prophet. We need not wonder that the people mourned: they were left now on all sides exposed to the enemy; their doom was within their own vision. It was not, however, Egypt that was to repeat its bondage over the house of Israel. Three years later King Nebuchadnezzar appeared before Jerusalem.

Jehoahaz. Josiah was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz who was twenty-three years old when he began to reign, but whose reign covered the brief period of only three months. The Egyptians at this time began their inroads into the country of Syria, and would naturally want to lay the people of Judah under tribute, not only that they might furnish revenue, but that they might also be prevented from placing any obstacles in the way of the Egyptians that would interfere with their march into the country to the northeast of the Promised Land. The new king was therefore put under a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold.

^dJer. 3:10.

Egypt and Assyria were now becoming more hostile toward each other. Necho, king of Egypt, fearing Jehoahaz, took him captive into Egypt and put his brother Eliakim on the throne of Judah.

Jehoiakim. His name, however, he changed to Jehoiakim. He likewise was a young man of twenty-five years when his reign began, but it lasted something like "eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God."^e

It will be seen that these two great rival powers in the valley of the Nile and in the valley of the Mesopotamia were tearing Judah asunder as a wild beast its prey. The scattering of the House of Judah had already begun; many of the Jews were now taken captive into Egypt. To oppose the Egyptians, the great king of Babylon started out on his expedition against Judah.

At this point we have a number of writers whose accounts in the matter of time are not harmonious. According to Daniel, chapter 1:1, Nebuchadnezzar went to Jerusalem in the third year of Jehoiakim's reign. According to Jeremiah, it was not before his fourth year. There is also some difference in the spelling of the Babylonian king's name; Jeremiah and Ezekiel spell it Nebuchadnezzar; the original in the Babylonian is Nebu-chad-ruzzer. It is made up, as will be seen, in three parts, like most Babylonian names in that period.

Nebuchadnezzar was the second monarch of the

^eII Chron. 36:5.

Babylonian empire. He ascended the throne in the year 604 B. C., and he reigned 43 years, dying in 561 B. C. He was the most celebrated of all the Babylonian monarchs, and he occupies the most conspicuous place of any heathen king in the Scriptures. He brought, during the periods of his wars, all the Syrians under subjection and carried on the siege of Tyre. His first expedition here spoken of, it is generally believed by historians, was while he was merely crown-prince and leader of the army under his father.

Necho. When Necho had carried on wars and brought all of the country of Syria up as far as the headwaters of the Euphrates river under Egyptian rule, Nebuchadnezzar began his wars against the Egyptians. This Babylonian monarch was a successful general and soon drove the Egyptians back within the confines of their own country. He took Jerusalem and carried off a number of its inhabitants as prisoners. When he had finished his great campaign he was suddenly called home on account of the death of his father.

The latter part of Jehoiakim's reign is covered in some obscurity. At this point there is some confusion in the course of history. The nations set against him on every side; he was taken captive and brought to the king of Babylon. At this time the headquarters of the Babylonian king was probably in Syria, somewhere on the Orontes River. It is believed by some historians that Jehoiakim was first taken to that place and later brought by

Nebuchadnezzar back to Jerusalem, where he was executed and his body treated as predicted by Jeremiah, 22:19 and 36:30:

“He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.”

“Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost.”

In Kings it is said that he slept with his fathers. His body in the end may have been gathered up from the place where it was, and put in the burial place at Jerusalem.

“And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river of Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt.”^f

Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin now succeeded his father, and when Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem, “the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.

“And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king’s house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said.

^fII Kings 24:7.

“And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land.”^g

Zedekiah. After the leaders of the ruling party of Jerusalem had been taken captive to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar put a new king upon the throne to rule over the poorer classes of people, and those who dwelt in the country. The name of this new king was Mattaniah, whose name was changed to Zedekiah. Judah was fast approaching its end. The last king under the old regime also “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

The leaders, those who were now in captivity, had strong hopes that they would soon be permitted to return to their native land. It seemed that Zedekiah himself entertained such a hope. Zedekiah finally sent messengers to Babylon, and after this made a personal visit to that country for the purpose of obtaining the restoration of the captives; but he did not seem to succeed with Nebuchadnezzar. He did not even succeed in getting Jehoiachin released from prison.

He therefore returned to his own country greatly inflamed in his mind against the Babylonians, and plotted a rebellion. At first he sought an alliance with the neighboring tribes of the country such as the people of Phoenicia, Moab, and Edom. Later he made overtures to the king of Egypt, who re-

^gII Kings 24:12-14.

ceived him favorably. Nebuchadnezzar now sent another expedition against Judah, and began again the siege of Jerusalem, which resulted in its final overthrow.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the condition of the people with respect to a knowledge of the law?
2. What was the sin of the people with reference to the law?
3. What were the curses of the book?
4. Give an account of Josiah.
5. Give an account of Jehoiakim.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are your views about early marriages?
2. What was the social and moral condition of Jerusalem when her princes were carried off into captivity?

NOTE

Great is the faith which can pass things incomprehensible and await the disclosures that come with death.

“Doubt no longer that the Highest is the wisest and the best,
Let not all that saddens Nature blight thy hope, or break thy
rest,

Quail not at the fiery mountain, at the shipwreck, or the
rolling

Thunder, or the rending earthquake, or the famine, or the pest.

“Neither mourn if human creeds be lower than the heart’s
desire;

Thro’ the gates that bar the distance comes a gleam of what
is higher.

Wait till death has flung them open, when the man will make
the Maker

Dark no more with human hatred in the glare of deathless
fire.”

—Tennyson.

CHAPTER 22

FALL OF JERUSALEM

(II Kings 25; Habbakuk)

There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we may.—Shakespeare.

The rebellion of Zedekiah brought Nebuchadnezzar and his host to Jerusalem. Now began the siege of that city which lasted almost a year and a half. The misfortunes of the city, the suffering of its people, are contained in part in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and we shall speak of them in the chapter dealing with that prophet. To add to the horrors of those awful days, a famine prevailed in the city. With famine came pestilence. It is said that the complexions of the men grew black; their skin was shrunk and parched upon their bodies; the rich and noble women searched dung heaps for scraps of offal. Children perished of starvation, and many of them were eaten by their parents. It is further said that a third part of the inhabitants died from the plague which grew out of the famine.

The Hatreds of the Siege. As the besieging army built its bounds and towers immediately without the walls of the city, the besieged would be subject to great dangers and often severe punishments. The darts of the enemy from the tower would make the poor soldiers cringe, and this unrelenting warfare carried on for a year and a half would naturally

beget the most intense hatreds. Hand to hand conflicts bring on personal animosities that are more intense than those created under our system of modern warfare.

Finally the walls of the city were broken down, but the warriors within made their escape, and the king with them, on their way toward the plain. This escape was no doubt in the direction of Jericho, by way of the Mount of Olives, before the king and the people of Judah who had escaped, were pursued. They were overtaken, and the captured king was taken to Nebuchadnezzar, whose headquarters at that time were at Riblah, northwest of Damascus. It should be remembered that at this time Nebuchadnezzar was conducting two great sieges,—one against Jerusalem, and one against Tyre, the city of the Phoenicians. He therefore established himself at a convenient place where he might send his armies in both directions. Along with the king were his sons, some of whom at this time must have been old enough to take part in the battle.

“And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.”^a

Those who were now found about the city are called Chaldeans. They were undoubtedly a part of the army of the Babylonian king, as Chaldea at this time had come under the power of Babylon.

Jeremiah (Note 1) warned Zedekiah that he

^aII Kings 25:7.

would fall into the hands of the Chaldeans if he persisted in his resistance. This cruelty towards Zedekiah and his sons was particularly shocking to the Jews, who were generally not considered so cruel in their wars, notwithstanding all the shocking things they did, as the nations of antiquity about them.

The City Destroyed. A few years later, the nineteenth of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, he sent one of his captains, Nebu-zar-adan, to Jerusalem:

“And he burnt the house of the Lord, and the king’s house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man’s house burnt he with fire.

“And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about.

“Now the rest of the people that were left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebu-zar-adan the captain of the guard carry away.

“But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen.”^b

The house of God was completely demolished; the brazen sea was broken to pieces; the sacred vessels of the house, and all vessels of brass were carried away; of the gold and silver they left nothing. When the city had fallen, the captain of the guard selected the leading citizens whose influence would be most likely to give the Babylonians trouble in the future. He therefore took the high priest Seriah

^bII Kings 25:9-12.

and the second high priest, and the three keepers of the door. With these he took the officer that was set over the men of war, and five of the men that were stationed with the king, the principal scribe of the host, and three score men of the people of the land that were found in the city.

These were taken to the king at Riblah, the headquarters of Nebuchadnezzar in the land of Hamoth, on the Orontes river. These were put to death by the king. According to those times, when we compare the fall of Jerusalem with the siege of other cities, they were not many to pay the penalty of death for their rebellion. Some writers think that Nebuchadnezzar was even moderate or merciful in the matter of vengeance.

The captivity which was begun in the third year of the reign of Jehoiachin, was now completed, and the fate that overtook the kingdom of Israel had now befallen the kingdom of Judah. There were, however, a few people left in the land of Judah over whom Gedaliah was made a ruler. As Jerusalem itself was razed to the ground, the capital of the ruler of the remnant was located at Mizpah.

Gedaliah. To Gedaliah certain leading men of the different tribes came when they learned that he had been elevated to be the ruler of the people. He undertook to pacify them and gave them assurances that all would be well with those who were willing to serve the king of Babylon. There arose, however, a conspiracy in which Ishmael, a member of the royal family of Judah, with others put Gedaliah

to death, as well as the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah.

“And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose, and came to Egypt: for they were afraid of the Chaldees.”^c

According to Jeremiah, the death of Gedaliah represents the atrocious character of the people at this time. Ishmael and his ten friends had been instigated by the Ammonites to put the new ruler to death. They came to his home in Mizpah, accepted his hospitality, and when they had “eaten of his salt” they arose suddenly and put him and his immediate attendants to death; and took the Chaldees that were kept there as a guard, and put everyone of them to the sword. Among those who went to Egypt was Jeremiah, who was very much opposed to this movement on the part of the remnant of the people.

Jehoiachin. Upon the death of Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiachin, who had been retained in prison, was given his liberty by Evil-merodach, the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar.

And he (Merodach) “spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon;

“And he changed his prison garments: and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life.”^d

^cII Kings 25:26.

^dII Kings 25:28, 29.

How long that life was we are not told. Jehoiachin was a very young man when he was taken captive and was hardly to be blamed for the condition that befell him and the people.

The Scythians. The evil that Manasseh did during his long reign in Judah was irreparable. He was upon the throne from 685 to 641 B. C. During all those years the people were more and more firmly established in their idolatrous and immoral practices. The rich had formed a cast that was extremely oppressive toward the poor, and it was an age when woman-kind exercised an unrighteous as well as an immoral dominion over the hearts of men. The successor to Manasseh, Amon, ruled a little less than two years, but he accomplished nothing. Josiah, his son, was watched over in his youth by the priests and the prophets with jealous care.

It was now about 626 B. C. when a new plague came upon the Land of Promise. There was a race of people, barbarians from south-eastern Russia, called Scythians. They spread out over the countries to the south of them, threatening the Mesopotamia as well as Palestine and Syria. They were the scourge of God. They were met by the king of Egypt in Palestine, and after receiving tribute from the people, turned back again. We do not know much of the extent of the damage which they did to the countries which they overran. They were more terrible than the Assyrians, and no doubt inflicted heavy losses upon the people of Judah. All

of this trouble came upon the people before the final overthrow of the city of Jerusalem.

In response to the word of God to Jeremiah, who questioned the prophet, saying, "What seest thou?" he replied, "I see a boiling caldron, and the face thereof is from the north." Then Jehovah said unto him, "Out of the north evil shall break forth upon the inhabitants of the land." A boiling caldron was perhaps the best description that could be given of the land of Judah in those days. The people wondered at their affliction and asked why it was that Jehovah would use a wicked nation to execute His purposes against His disobedient people. They might be bad, they argued,—but there was that old spirit of justification, that bad as they were, those who punished them were worse. Where was the justice in such a thing?

Habbakuk. In the closing scenes ending the kingdom of Judah, there appeared one of the minor prophets, whose brief space in history may perhaps be best disposed of in this place. It will be noticed that the names of different nationalities are used. The people of the valley of the Mesopotamia who came up against the people of God were known in the order of their kingdoms as the Chaldeans, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Medes and Persians.

The Chaldeans are mentioned in the time when the Babylonians set up their kingdom, and the Chaldeans were no doubt used by the Babylonians in the support of their great empire. The people of the

Mesopotamia in the time of the Babylonians Habakkuk mentions as the Chaldeans. His place in history may be fixed somewhere about the close of the seventh century B. C., just shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. The Jews at this early time could not conceive that Jerusalem could ever be violated.

Habakkuk lived in those turbulent days, and wondered why the righteous should suffer so much at the hands of the wicked. He mourned also the silence of God and predicted, when the voice of God came to him, the great destruction that would come upon the people. Space will permit only a brief mention of this, the eighth and the last of the minor prophets of Israel. The anguish of his despair is recorded in the following words:

“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?

“And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?”^e

Truly, those were days of despair; Jerusalem was reduced to the ground. Those who were not carried away captive into Babylon at that time sought refuge in Egypt. For seventy years they were in bondage, and we shall have to follow them to a strange land among a strange people until they have paid the penalty of their offenses against Jehovah.

^eHab. 1:14.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Give an account of the siege of Jerusalem.
2. Give an account of its final destruction.
3. Who was Gedaliah?
4. Who were the Scythians?
5. Who was Habbakuk?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Punishment by the wicked is often excessively wicked. Why does God permit it?
2. Why should God-fearing individuals suffer for national sins that are not always universal?

NOTES

Am reading Jeremiah at present at family worship. What richness of metaphor and of feeling; what heart-broken eloquence; what a noble, weeping, wrestling, divine soul he was! His tears came down large, electric, like the first drops of a thunder-cloud. He is not so picturesque, but he is fully as eloquent as Isaiah. He has no passage so powerful as some in that prophet: but he is as a whole not inferior. He is the Demosthenes of sorrow, and often, too, of Philippic fire—with all his vehemence and intensity, but with far more poetry.—Gilfillan.

Jeremiah enters with intimate sympathy into his relations with Israel, the wounded love, the burning indignation, the readiness to forgive. And he in turn lays bare his soul to God. Startled at the disclosure of the evil possibilities of his own heart, deceitful and desperately sick, he prays the skilled Physician of Souls, who knows his malady through and through, to heal him. Or when his lot becomes too bitter, and he can endure it no longer, he turns upon God now with plaintive expostulation, now even with fierce resentment. And God shows him scant sympathy, rather He rebukes him for faltering and bids him brace himself for trials still more severe, rising above his human weakness in the faith that the Divine promise of protection would be fulfilled.—Hastings.

It is a great hour in any man's life when he is obliged to stand up alone and state his case or defend his cause. What an hour that was in Paul's history when before the Roman officials "no man stood with him," but, dependent as he was on sympathy and fellowship, he stood alone! It is when a man is absolutely left alone, in danger or disgrace, that the deepest test of his character is reached. That is the reason why the night-time, which seems to say to us, "You are alone with God," has its impressiveness and why the death hour has a similar impressiveness.—McClure.

CHAPTER 23

THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH

(Isaiah)

A great soul is above insult, injustice, grief, and mockery.—Bruyere.

One of the most remarkable prophets in all ancient Israel was Isaiah, whose book of prophecies is worthy of a more extensive study than is here permitted. He is such a striking character that it is necessary here to give a brief review of Judah's history prior to the fall of Jerusalem in order that this wonderful man may be seen from the standpoint of his own personal history and individuality.

He was first of all called to warn Judah. The distance between Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, and Samaria, the capital of the Ten Tribes, is only about thirty miles. It is remarkable that the Ten Tribes should have lost their kingdom more than one hundred years before the fall of Jerusalem; but the people of Judah, in their earlier history, were more exemplary in their worship and conformed more to the requirements of God.

There are certain great events upon which Isaiah dwells: First, he gives in his day a picture of the city of Jerusalem; he warns the Jews against their belief that Jehovah was bound to protect His chosen city of Jerusalem. They might save it and themselves, but only upon the condition that they re-

pented thoroughly of their evil ways. It was an age of commercial greed, and the Jews oppressed one another and their poor brethren by extortions of all kinds, and the rich flaunted their luxury in the faces of the poor; and their manner of worship was of the most formal.

They had abandoned themselves to ease, to riches, and to pleasure; they had resorted to the worship of false gods, because the requirements of that worship were less exacting of them. They also imagined that God could be satisfied by the observance of ceremonials, and the gifts made to Him in the temple. What He wanted of them was a simple honesty, true mercy, and justice,—things that were shamefully disregarded in their daily associations with one another.

Forgiveness Promised and Sin Denounced. And the prophet would have the Jews understand that God's punishment was for their reformation, and not an act of vengeance: there was yet a chance for them if they would only repent, but there were grievous sins at their door. Before the awful judgment, God said to His chosen people:

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

"If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land."^a

Willingness and obedience have been the stum-

^aIsaiah 1:18, 19.

bling block in all ages between God and man. Repentance was within the reach of men; the chances, however, were against them if they would persist in sin.

“How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

“Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water:

“Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.”^b

That the city was abandoned to a pleasureable life, and that its women reflected in the description Isaiah gives of them the sins of their age we learn from the following:

“What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts.

“Moreover the Lord saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet:

“* * * The Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon,

“The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers,

“The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings,

^bIsaiah 1:21-23.

“The rings, and nose jewels,

“The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crissing pins,

“The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the vails.

“And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty.

“Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war.

“And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground.”^c

It is difficult to imagine that in those early days such extremes of fashion and pride, the allurements to wickedness, were possible.

Events of the last Days Foretold. Isaiah looked far into the future.

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

“And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”^d

^cIsaiah 3:15-26.

^dIsaiah 2:2, 3.

A clear indication that the prophet foresaw the gathering in the last days, not simply the gathering of the house of Israel, neither the gathering of the house of Judah, but a gathering of all the nations, such as belongs to this last dispensation, is given in the following:

“And in that day, there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.”^e

The people who heard these warnings needed them, but would not heed: they had ears but would not hear; eyes, but would not see. Against them the prophet thundered his awful denunciations:

“Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight.”^f

One of the unfortunate conditions of those unhappy times is described by the prophet in the following:

“As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.”^g

Isaiah and Ahaz. Isaiah warned Ahaz, king of Judah, against an alliance with northern Israel or Syria. Ahaz could not aid his neighbors against such a powerful foe as Assyria, and on the other

^eIsaiah 11:10.

^fIsaiah 5:21.

^gIsaiah 3:12.

hand he was scarcely prepared to draw upon himself the combined enmity of the Ten Tribes and their allies, the people of Syria. His only escape was by an appeal to the great Assyrian king in order that he might be separated from those on whom the Assyrian monarch would wreak vengeance.

In those trying times the king of Judah was disposed to listen to the prophet. The appeal of Ahaz to Tiglath-pileser put off the evil day, but through his appeal, he lost the independence of Judah. The wisdom of Isaiah's counsel to the king was vindicated. The Ten Tribes were taken away into Assyrian captivity, and Judah was left a vassal to the great king of Assyria. For a period of something like ten years after the fall of the Ten Tribes we have no clue to the mission of Isaiah: all is left to our imagination. There would be plenty of work to do. He was no longer concerned about the influence of the Ten Tribes upon the kingdom of Judah, but a new danger appeared on the horizon.

We may believe from what the prophet says that Egypt for centuries held a predominant influence over Palestine. Egypt's civilization the Israelites had in some measure inherited through traditions, and the Egyptians were so close that the relations between the two countries were more or less familiar. It would be quite natural, therefore, that in such a state of preference for Egypt the people of Judah would be admitted into an alliance with that country. The prophet Isaiah foresaw its dangers and warned the people against them. He showed

them that their strength lay in Jehovah and not in alliances.

In those ancient times the prophet humiliated himself before the Lord:

“And the Lord said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia:

“So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot.”^h

Isaiah was dealing with politics in ancient Israel. He warned the people of his country against putting confidence in the horses and chariots of Egypt.

Isaiah and Sennacherib. Sargon had carried away the Ten Tribes into captivity, and his son Sennacherib was now upon the throne of Assyria. Hezekiah had come to rule over Judah. New rulers brought about new fears. All the nations about Judah were at first plundered and then carried into captivity; all the country round about was in a whirlpool of confusion. Hezekiah sought to purchase freedom by an immense tribute, so large that it impoverished the country, and the peace thus purchased was only of short duration. Sennacherib did not trust the king of Jerusalem, and in one of his new invasions he moved his army down to Sidon, thence south along the coast of the Mediterranean, until he brought all the people under his domain.

Just before the king's further invasion of Judah, Isaiah might have been seen walking the streets of

^hIsaiah 20:3, 4.

Jerusalem in the garb of a captive of war. He was reminding the people of the awful judgment about to fall upon them; a terrible crisis was at hand. The people, however, were over-confident. Jerusalem had already fixed itself upon their imagination so strongly that they could hardly think of a God that did not have a Jerusalem in which to dwell.

As the new danger of Sennacherib approached them, the people renewed the empty ceremonies of their religion. They rushed to the temple with their offerings, came into its courts, and did all they could by their sacrifices to placate Jehovah and relieve themselves from the threatened danger. The prophet reminds them that it is not these sacrifices that the Lord requires; He wants them to reform; to quit their oppressions of the poor; to live virtuously and truthfully and honorably with one another and to their God. Isaiah is not without the word of the Lord and he delivers it to them:

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

“A sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. * * *

“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacri-

fices unto me? said the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.”ⁱ

Hezekiah takes warning from Isaiah, takes the letter which King Sennacherib sends him, and brings it to the Lord in the temple and pleads for divine aid. The army of Sennacherib is smitten but the inevitable day has been merely postponed.

“Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria:

“This is the word which the Lord hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.”^j

“Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it.”

A Tribute to Isaiah. There has perhaps been no higher tribute paid by the world at large to any prophet than that paid to Isaiah. His book is full of wisdom, of purity, of beauty and divine warnings. It is a book filled with applications to all ages and all people: to those who would live godly lives in Christ Jesus, it is full of consolation; to those who

ⁱIsaiah 1:1-4, 11.

^jIsaiah 37:21, 22, 33.

believe in the justice of God, it is full of encouragement to do right; to those who would admonish, it is full of wisdom and courage.

It is read perhaps more than any prophet of the Bible.

It is so plain in its revelations that it opens the vision of men to the coming of the Messiah; it is so far-reaching in time that it portrays the gathering in the last days. No preacher of righteousness, no man who would take on courage in his struggle to live an upright life, can be without the wisdom and the spirit of Isaiah. All in all, it is one of the most remarkable books ever written.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What change did Isaiah find in Jerusalem?
2. What was the condition of the women of Jerusalem?
3. How was war made to punish women?
4. What were the prophecies of Isaiah respecting the last days?
5. What are your views of the Book of Isaiah?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do sins, if forgiven, always leave a sting or a stain?
2. What analogy do you find between the molly-coddled condition of many of our youth today and the people described by Isaiah, "As for my people, children are their oppressors and women rule over them."

NOTE

The Hebrew term for righteousness denotes that which is perfectly straight. The Greek is that which divides equally to all, apportions to every one his due, whilst the Latin means that which is commanded. The thought expressed by the Hebrew root is deeper than that which is conveyed by either the Latin or the Greek. The Romans were a military people, a nation of soldiers, and the idea of righteousness in their

minds was naturally associated with that of obedience to orders. The Greeks were a people foremost in all that ministers to social enjoyment and civilization, and their idea of righteousness was that which accorded to each the possession of his due. The thought of an antecedent and eternal distinction between right and wrong, as a straight line drawn from earth to Heaven, apart from the present results of good and evil, runs through the whole system of Old Testament morality, and that thought is graphically represented under the image of that which is perfectly straight. According to Euclid, a straight line is the shortest which can be drawn from one point to another, and in the Jewish tongue Righteousness is the most direct path towards the Great White Throne. So we find that the usual word for sinning—Kha-ta—means not only that of missing the mark, as generally taken, but also of swerving from this straight line, and thereby making so much the longer the sinner's journey towards the goal and aim of his existence.—Saulez.

CHAPTER 24

JEREMIAH

(685-641 B. C.)

Our sins, like to our shadows, when our day was in its glory, scarce appeared; toward our evening, how great and monstrous!—Suckling.

The Call of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was the second of the great trio of prophets that dealt with the fall of Jerusalem and the captivity of its unhappy people in Babylon. Going back briefly over the history of Judah and its downfall, we learn that Manasseh, during his long reign, had established very firmly the idolatrous practices which were sapping the strength of the nation. He was succeeded by his son Amon, who reigned only two years, and whose son Josiah was put upon the throne. Josiah, however, could not stem the downward course of the nation.

It was in the midst of these distressing days that the call of God came to **Jeremiah of Anathoth**. The Lord declared that he knew Jeremiah before he was born. The home of Jeremiah, Anathoth, was no doubt the village near Jerusalem where groups of priests lived, and from which they proceeded in trains to Jerusalem to officiate in the temple.

The Scythians. This prophet saw the **invasion of the Scythians**, whom he compared with a boiling caldron. He likewise raised his voice in warnings

to Judah. To his mind these people, the most terribly destructive of any in their day, were overrunning the country. But the cause of Judah was not hopeless:

“If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me: and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove.”^a

Their deliverance depended upon their reformation. What the Lord required of them was a spirit of righteousness and repentance.

The Wickedness of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was bad, perhaps hopelessly bad:

“Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it.”^b

“To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me.”^c

Jeremiah made himself in and about Jerusalem by his prophetic utterances a well-known personage. For some reason he returned to his home at Anathoth where he found a conspiracy against his life. He told the people that Jehovah gave him knowledge of it and showed him their doings, that

^aJer. 4:1.

^bJer. 5:1.

^cJer. 6:20.

he himself was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.

Jeremiah Wonders. The prophet saw the prosperity of those who were leading the people astray, who were oppressing their brethren, who were leading the Jews into idolatry, and living in luxury. He had uttered the words of the Lord manifested to him in a revelation. Their fulfillment was not prompt, and he wondered and asked the Lord questions which men are asking themselves even today.

“Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? * * *

“But thou, O Lord, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.”^d

Why do the wicked prosper? They prosper for a little season. The judgments of God were not rapid enough for the prophet; he had grown weary and faint. He saw no hope of reformation in the people, and he was ready to witness all the judgments of Jehovah against them. But God was yet merciful! It is wonderful how the mercies of God outlast the mercies of man. Even in those days there began the development of that strange belief which has lasted and become perhaps stronger even in our day,—the belief that financial and social prosperity

^dJer. 12:1, 3.

is a sign of righteousness, and that suffering is the result of sin.

Jeremiah in the Stocks. The denunciation of their wickedness by Jeremiah brought upon him the hatred and violent opposition of the people; he was put in the stocks. If stocks of ancient times were like those of modern times, they consisted of a plank with attachments at each end which received both the hands and both the feet and kept the prisoner in a bended position such as creates great pain. This was all a very trying time for the prophet. In the anguish of his soul he exclaimed:

“O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me.

“For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily.

“Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.”^e

He was swept by the zeal of the spirit; he was not himself; the burning fire within consumed his fear and emboldened him to speak the words which God put in his mouth. Between his fears and his human weakness, and the Spirit of God that was upon him, he moved to and fro like the pendulum

^eJer. 20:7-9.

of a clock. He was up and down, first full of fire, and then full of fear.

“Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed.

“Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad.”^f

Cursed be the day wherein he struggled in his labor and sorrows, and felt that his days should be consumed with shame.

Nebuchadnezzar, Instrument of God's Punishment. The greatest enemy among the nations associated with ancient Israel up to this time was King Nebuchadnezzar, who took the people of Jerusalem captive into Babylon. He had built the greatest city of all antiquity up to that time; it was the business, religious, and political center of the old world.

Jeremiah was disappointed when he saw the best blood of Jerusalem, the sons of the kings and princes and men of wealth of their provinces, carried off captive into Babylon. The city itself, however, was not destroyed, and the king made Zedekiah the ruling monarch. Zedekiah was the oldest son of Josiah, and when he was made king he took the oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. The prophet did all in his power to keep Zedekiah faithful to his pledge. The people of Jerusalem who were left behind did not appeal so strongly to the prophet. He sent letters to those in Babylon to admonish

^fJer. 20:14-15.

them to serve the Lord. Those who were left, however, he warned against assuming that they were more virtuous than their brethren who had been taken into exile.

A new question had now to be solved by the people. They had learned to worship God in Jerusalem and at the temple in the Holy City. Could Jehovah be worshiped in any place outside of the Promised Land? They speculated about a lost land and a lost God. The prophet encouraged the people in Babylon to be patient, and warned them against the prediction of false prophets that they should have a speedy return.

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon;

“Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them;

“Take ye wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there and not diminished.

“And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

“For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither

hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed.

“For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the Lord.

“For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. * * *

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”^g

The Home Prophets. Jeremiah had not only the difficult task of guarding the exiles in far-off Babylon against false prophets, but he also had to contend with those who sought to persuade Zedekiah by telling him that there would be a speedy end of the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. These prophets were governed no doubt, in their predictions, by the fact of the frequent changes that had taken place in the valley of the Mesopotamia. The events so far had justified the words of Jeremiah, and made him feared, if he was not always heeded. He wished to give the people an object lesson, as the Lord had directed him to do:

“Thus saith the Lord to me: Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck,

“And send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah;

^gJer. 29:4-13.

“And command them to say unto their masters, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say unto your masters;

“I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me.

“And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him.

“And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son’s son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him.

“And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the Lord, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand.”^h

Lying Prophets. This was the exaltation of a heathen king, an idolatrous king, whom God made the instrumentality of His purpose. The people were also warned not to heed the words of the lying prophets in Jerusalem:

“For they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish.”ⁱ

^hJer. 27:2-8.

ⁱJer. 27:10.

As an illustration of what Jeremiah had to meet, there arose **Hananiah of Gibeon**, who spoke as follows:

“Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.

“Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the Lord’s house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon:

“And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the Lord: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.”^j

As the people had lost their spiritual discernment, it will be easily seen that such a contention would be to them a source of confusion. They would prefer to believe Hananiah, because his words were in harmony with their hopes. This false prophet took from Jeremiah’s neck the yoke and broke it; but the Lord reminded him and the people through the prophet Jeremiah, that he had merely broken bars of wood, and that they should receive bars of iron instead.

“Hear now, Hananiah,” said Jeremiah the prophet; “the Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie.

“Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year

^jJer. 28:2-4.

thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord.

“So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.”^k

Zedekiah Yields to False Prophets. The king of Judah yielded to the persuasions of the false prophets and placed his trust in the king of Egypt, against whom he had been warned. Pharaoh Hophra could not help him, but brought upon Jerusalem, that was already well-nigh ruined, another siege by Nebuchadnezzar. As we have learned previously, Zedekiah soon underwent an awful ordeal.

Before this happened, and in his greatest distress, he turned to Jeremiah, but the prophet had no words of consolation for him. He could simply say that the city should be taken and burned, and that Zedekiah would be carried away as a captive into Babylon.

In those awful days there were no doubt those who looked upon Jeremiah as the cause of all their misfortunes, and he was therefore made a prisoner, and they would have put him to death. He was cast into a dungeon, probably an old cistern, as we learn that the bottom of it contained much mud in which the prophet had to wallow. From this dungeon, however, we learn that the prophet was rescued and put under a guard. While on his way to his home in Anathoth the prophet was seized and again cast into prison. He was in great danger of losing his life and feeling ran high against him.

^kJer. 28:15-17.

The Egyptians were useless; they returned to their country, and left the people of Jerusalem to their fate. The Babylonians, called in the Bible, "Chaldeans," burned the king's house, broke down the walls of Jerusalem, and took the remaining part of the people of the city into captivity. There were a few, however, who were allowed to remain. They were those considered as an unimportant class by Nebuchadnezzar. They soon fell into a condition of anarchy, and fearing that they too would be carried into Babylon, made their escape into Egypt. They went against the solemn warnings of the prophet Jeremiah. Whether he died in Egypt, returned to Palestine, or found his way into Babylon we are not told. His message to the people was not received; his warnings were unheeded, and persecutions made his trials at times unbearable.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does the call of Jeremiah teach us about pre-existence?
2. How was Jeremiah treated by the people of Jerusalem?
3. How did those left in the land compare themselves with those carried into exile?
4. How were the people misled by false prophets?
5. What was the condition of the Egyptians in the days of Jeremiah?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do the meditations of life hold most of the secrets of our happiness?
2. Why do wicked men so often prosper?

NOTE

Like many of the world's greatest children, Jeremiah was little esteemed in his life, but when dead his spirit breathed out upon men, and they felt its beauty and greatness. The oppressed people saw for ages in his sufferings a type of itself, and drew from his constancy courage to endure and be true. Imagery from the scenes of his life and echoes of his words fill many of the Psalms, the authors of which were like him in his sorrows, and strove to be like him in his faith. From being of no account as a prophet, he came to be considered the greatest of them all, and was spoken of as "the prophet;" and it was told of him how in after days he appeared in visions to those contending for the faith like an angel from heaven strengthening them.—G. Steven.

CHAPTER 25

EZEKIEL

We cannot think too highly of our friends, nor too humbly of ourselves.—Colton.

The Jews in Captivity. Going back to the first kingdom that was taken over to Babylon, by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B. C., we find Jerusalem bereft of its leadership, its craftsmen, its nobility, its writers, its prophets. They were lodged on what is called the river Sherbar, evidently one of the great navigable canals that in those days crossed the valley of the Mesopotamia. Here the Jews were located in a favorable part of the empire. Their opportunities for commercial progress were greater than they had been in Jerusalem.

But the captivity proved to be a leveling process. When they reached the Mesopotamia they were denuded of all their wealth and had to begin life anew; the distinction between rich and poor and great and small was, in a large measure, wiped out. We shall never know in this life how much of men's so-called successes depends upon the wheel of good fortune to which they often become accidentally attached. We know that temporary advantages roll up often like the snow ball into permanent gains.

It should be noted here in passing that God, in the course of His dispensations among the children

an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee." * * *

"Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

"And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,

"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."^a

Individual Sins. From the time that Moses gave the law of God to the people at Mount Sinai, there had grown up among them a belief that the sins of the fathers and the sins of the children were so interwoven that the one was made responsible for the wrong-doings of the other. "The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation," was the declared word of God in those early days.

Throughout the early history of Israel there are numerous instances where the judgments of God fell upon a man and upon all his household; when men were punished in groups, as though their sins had been collective. How far this idea was carried by the Israelites we do not know. Undoubtedly, there was a feeling among them that they would all rise or fall together; that what was good enough for all of them was good enough for each of them.

^aEzekiel 3:4-6, 15-17.

No doubt, too, men sought to shirk responsibility, when they said to themselves, I must do as others do.

Sin of All Ages. Such logic was not the sin of their age only, but it has been the sin of all ages. Men have found it convenient to drift with the tide of human conduct. They are even now too often satisfied when they make themselves believe that though they be not good, and though they fulfill not the requirements of Jehovah, they are as good as others, and that their reward will be the common reward of all. Out of this condition Ezekiel undertakes to lift the people:

“The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying,

“What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?

“As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.

“Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

“But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right,

“And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, * * *

“And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by vio

lence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment;

“He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man,

“Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just he shall surely live, saith the Lord God. * * *

“Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live.

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.”^b

This was to Israel a new if not a startling announcement. It was revolutionary for those days.

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”^c

In those days there grew up a belief that God delighted in vengeance; that vengeance carried with it death; and that when men died in their wickedness or were put to death by their enemies,

^cEzekiel 18:30.

^bEzekiel 18:1-9, 19-20.

God was delighted. Ezekiel pointed out to the captives that such was not the principle of God's ways, that He was a God of mercy, of love, of forbearance; that men brought upon themselves through their sins those punishments that overtook them in those days. What God felt it was His duty to do in the reformation of His children, and what He took a pleasure in doing were two different things.

"For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."^d

False Hopes of the Captives. It was not easy for the captives to settle down in a spirit of resignation to the punishment and discipline they were to undergo. They brought the crimes of their enemies before God. Jehovah must surely avenge the wrongs that had been put upon them. Their eyes turned to Jerusalem, and they hoped and believed that it would not be destroyed. At last the unhappy news of its destruction reached them in their lonely captivity.

In the course of time those who had remained to see Jerusalem utterly razed to the ground met their brethren in a distant land whither they had marched over a long stretch of country covering nearly a thousand miles. It must really have looked to them as though they had been deserted by their God, as though the God of Babylon was in the end triumphant,—for to them God was above all things a God

^dEzekiel 18:32.

of power. If He could not resist, He did not fulfill the requirements of His worshipers. Such was the general view of those who professed religion in those times.

As long as the city was undestroyed, they had something to hope for, something to look forward to—their return. No wonder they wept. Little by little, however, they were transformed into a new life. They were among a strange people, had new lessons to learn, and above all they had an individual training which meant an individual responsibility and an individual worship that they had hitherto not known. The destruction of their city, however, was a great blow to their faith.

Judah's Punishment Realized. The people now came to a fuller realization of the reality of their punishment. They had opportunity now to reflect upon the words of those prophets who had admonished them faithfully in the past. They learned that Jehovah would not be mocked; that His curses had overtaken them because of their wickedness. They had been ready to put His prophets to death; now they must learn the lesson of obedience. During these seventy years of exile, or perhaps more accurately sixty-eight years, they had to unlearn those things that had made them perverse and stubborn. In their lamentations they wept, and their great sorrow softened their hearts and prepared them to worship Jehovah anew.

Reassurances. The people, however, were not left without Jehovah's comfort. As years passed

on, the opportunity of their return appeared less and less to them; they must have imagined that all of their ideas about being God's chosen people would never be realized. Ezekiel now has to remind them that in due time they should feel God's sustaining power and witness His love in their behalf.

Ezekiel is sometimes called a man of visions. One perhaps of the most remarkable is that of the dry bones:

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones,

"And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.

"And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord, thou knowest.

"Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

"Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live:

"And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.

"So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I

prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together bone to his bone.

“And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

“Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.

“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

“Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.

“Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.

“And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves,

“And shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.”^e

^eEzekiel 37:1-14,

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the condition of Judah in their captivity?
2. What was Ezekiel's message to the people of Jerusalem?
3. What were the false hopes of the captives?
4. In what way did the Jews receive, while in Babylon, a training they needed for their restoration?
5. How did natural environments in Babylon differ from those at Jerusalem?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the effect of a belief in a common sin?
2. What is the warning of the Jews in captivity to those who magnify the sins of others, yet see not their own evil ways?

NOTE

Of much greater importance, however, is the state of mind which prevailed among those exiles. And here the remarkable thing is their intense preoccupation with matters national and Israelitic. A lively intercourse with the mother country was kept up, and the exiles were perfectly informed of all that was going on in Jerusalem. There were, no doubt, personal and selfish reasons for their keen interest in the doings of their countrymen at home. The antipathy which existed between the two branches of the Jewish people was extreme. The exiles had left their children behind them to suffer under the reproach of their fathers' misfortunes. They appear also to have been compelled to sell their estates hurriedly on the eve of their departure, and such transactions, necessarily turning to the advantage of the purchasers, left a deep grudge in the breasts of the sellers. Those who remained in the land exulted in the calamity which had brought so much profit to themselves, and thought themselves perfectly secure in so doing, because they regarded their brethren as men driven out for their sins from Jehovah's heritage. The exiles on their part affected the utmost contempt for the pretensions of the upstart plebians who were carrying things with a high hand in Jerusalem. Like the French emigres in the time of the Revolution, they no doubt felt that their country was being ruined for want of proper guidance and experienced statesmanship. Nor was it altogether patrician prejudice that gave them this feeling of their own superiority.

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel regarded the exiles as the better part of the nation, and the nucleus of the Messianic community of the future. For the moment, indeed, there does not seem to have been much to choose, in point of religious belief and practice, between the two sections of the people. In both places the majority were steeped in idolatrous and superstitious notions; some appear even to have entertained the purpose of assimilating themselves to the heathen around, and only a small minority were steadfast in their allegiance to the national religion. Yet the exiles could not, any more than the remnant in Judah, abandon the hope that Jehovah would save His sanctuary from desecration. The Temple was the excellency of their strength, the delight of their eyes, and that which their soul desired. False prophets appeared in Babylon to prophesy smooth things, and assure the exiles of a speedy restoration to their place as the people of God. It was not till Jerusalem was laid in ruins, and the Jewish state had disappeared from the earth, that the Israelites were in a mood to understand the meaning of God's judgment, or to learn the lessons which the prophecy of nearly two centuries had vainly striven to inculcate.—Hastings.

CHAPTER 26

ISAIAH IN BABYLON

(Isaiah)

The mighty hopes that make us men.—Tennyson.

It is chiefly through the prophets that our information about the life and conditions of the Jews in Babylon is derived. Nebuchadnezzar was a conspicuous figure not only in the ancient history of Babylon, but also in his relation to God's people. He was evidently a military genius, and a man for his time of considerable liberality and kind disposition.

Ancient Nations. The student of this period of secular history may become somewhat confused from the Bible use of certain names such as Chaldeans, Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians. It should be stated that the earliest great monarchy in the lower Mesopotamian valley was the Chaldean. The Chaldeans were overthrown by the Assyrians, who built up the country farther to the north, more in the central part of Mesopotamia, and established the great city of Nineveh, to whose inhabitants Jonah brought his warning.

The Assyrian kingdom was overthrown by the Babylonians, whose capital was the city of Babylon, which became the most magnificent city perhaps of antiquity up to that time. Finally, the Babylonians

were overthrown by the Medes and Persians under Cyrus. Sometimes the Bible refers to the people of Mesopotamia, and their rulers as the Chaldeans, when as a matter of fact the Chaldeans had been overthrown by the Babylonians, and even in the time of the Persians the people of Mesopotamia are referred to as Babylonians. This, however, is not a matter of serious consequence, except that it is likely to confuse the student unless this order of ancient kingdoms is kept in mind.

Kings of Babylon. Upon the death of Nebuchadnezzar he bequeathed his immense empire to his son Evil-merodach. This new king was a man of weak character and ruled only a couple of years, but during his reign he gave to the Jewish king Jehoiachin his liberty. The changes in the monarchs of Babylon naturally created some hope or expectation in the minds of the Jews that they would be relieved of their exile,—perhaps some new freedom would come to them, and then on the other hand there was the constant fear that a more severe oppression would befall them, so that between their hopes and their fears they did not have much courage, much disposition to work, to plant and to reap, as their prophet had commanded them to do.

Evil-merodach, after two years' reign, was assassinated by his brother-in-law, Gilgal-sharezar, who seized the throne of Babylon in the year 558 B. C. This new king adopted more the policy of Nebuchadnezzar, and spent much of his time build-

ing grand palaces and temples; and as he was an assassin himself, took great precautions that he should be protected from his enemies. He died, however, and left the throne to his son, Labashi-Murduk, who was a young boy, and whom the nobles murdered after a reign of nine months.

Those who overthrew the regime of this boy put on the throne Nabonidus in the year 554 B. C. His interests were chiefly religious, and he spent much time building temples, renovating old ones, making collections of the different kinds of gods round about, and neglected it is said the commercial and political interests of the empire.

It was this Nabonidus who left the government of the city of Babylon chiefly to his son Bel-Sharuzur; and it was he who joined the Egyptians in an alliance against Cyrus, king of Persia. Cyrus, as we shall see later on, became the liberator of the Jews. This brings us down to the middle of the sixth century B. C., the period of Cyrus and the return of the Jews to Palestine.

Another Isaiah. During all this period of captivity, in round numbers seventy years, the Jews were undergoing a very severe training, an experience in bondage. It was during that period that an Isaiah flourished, who is believed in modern times to be a separate Isaiah from one who prophesied in Babylon. In other words, modern writers look upon chapters 40 to 66 of Isaiah as the work of an entirely different author. If the Isaiah of Babylon was the Isaiah of Palestine, he must have

been an extremely old man, for the Isaiah of Babylon began his prophecies at Jerusalem at the time of King Uzziah. That would be about the time of Uzziah's death, about 740 B. C. Now the death of Nebuchadnezzar was about 560. B. C. Isaiah would be at that time already a hundred years old. Still, he may have prophesied much before the death of Nebuchadnezzar.

Chamberlain says, in commenting on the prophets of that early period: "We will call him Isaiah of Babylon, because in the confusion of passing years, his wonderful utterances were bound up with those of Isaiah of Jerusalem, whose work preceded his by more than half a century. He is really unknown, not only in his name, but also in the facts of his life, save only that he was among the captive Hebrews in Babylonia. His words portray not himself, but the glory of Jehovah, and the great manifestation of his power and favor which was about to appear."

There has been of late years much speculation about the authorship of the different parts of Isaiah. Those who are interested in a technical study of the Bible may wish to pursue these discussions which are given in all modern dictionaries of the Bible and in Old Testament literature. Here, however, we are interested more with the book itself.

The book of Isaiah is a great book. Its literature in some passages is the most sublime of Holy Writ. Its conceptions of God are in places almost without parallel; and all in all it has had a most wonderful influence upon Jewish life. Isaiah is quoted by the

Jewish people more than any other prophet. His influence upon the life of the Jews is very remarkable, so much so that one can hardly appreciate modern Jewish life and many of its striking peculiarities without an intimate knowledge of Isaiah.

Isaiah possessed in his day the spirit of gathering; first, the spirit of gathering of the Jews, their return from Babylon, and also their return to Jerusalem, from their great dispersion, in the last days. While the spirit of gathering was upon him, he prophesied things down to the last days, things that are dear to the hearts of Latter-day Saints, who find in his words assurances that in the visions of his mind he saw our own day. Volumes are written on Isaiah, so wonderful is his book. I can give here only the most striking passages.

Jews in Captivity. The Jewish people who sat by the river and wept were no doubt a solemn people whose heavy hearts made it quite impossible for them to enter into the new life of a foreign country with any feeling of joyful expectation. It is true many of them became favorites, through the influence of God, at the courts, as we shall see in reviewing the history of this period under other prophets. There were business men among the Jews. The commercial qualities of Jewish life have characterized that people down to the present time. To build homes and make farms, raise stock and engage in permanent pursuits was not in harmony with their yearning to return to the Land of Promise. Palestine was not so inviting a country as the

Mesopotamia, but the commerce of Babylon held out great attractions; the opportunities for speculation were abounding on every hand; and the Jews naturally would take to that which was closest at hand and of a temporary character. Business life met their immediate wants.

They had evidently been very greatly humiliated, for God sends His prophet to comfort them. The prophet tells them that his mission is one of comfort to the people, whose suffering had more than compensated for past sins. They must be aroused from their state of lethargy; new hopes must be awakened within them. The older generation was passing away, and the new generation must not be allowed to forget that after all they were strangers in a strange land, that Babylon was not their home, that they must not be allowed to form attachments for their adopted country, neither must they be permitted to receive its abominations.

Isaiah Comforts the Jews. Isaiah bursts forth in the memorable words:

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

“Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.

“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

“Every valley shall be exalted, and every moun-

tain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

“And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

“The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field:

“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.

“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

“O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! (Note.)

“Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

“Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?”^a

^aIsaiah 40:1-12.

In those lonely days and silence of God's revelations the people may well have thought themselves overlooked by Jehovah. They must have felt that their belief that they were God's chosen people was without any sound foundation. Their faith had been severely tested, and why should they not turn to the nations about them for comfort, for fellowship, for a place in the life of the world occupied by other nations?

The Jews were not easily absorbed by others, even had they been disposed to forget Jehovah and wander away from Him. He had already filled the hearts and conceptions of the nations among whom they had sojourned, as He has done in the wanderings of Jews during the many centuries that have intervened since the destruction of Jerusalem soon after Christ, with the idea that the Jews were an undesirable people in their midst. Through Isaiah God sent them new assurances and comforted their doubting hearts: (Note.)

"Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Isaiah, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall :

“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”^b

What a wonderful chapter of history, always fresh and exalting in its beauty and inspiration!

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Name the ancient nations of Mesopotamia in their chronological order.
2. What has given rise to the belief that there were two distinct Isaiahs?
3. What special training did the Jews receive in Babylon?
4. What comfort did Isaiah bring to the Jews in bondage?
5. What was the attitude of the Jews toward the surrounding nations?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is meant by the words “waiting upon the Lord?”
2. What at this time helped to make the Jews a “peculiar people?”

NOTES

1. Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control
That o’er thee swell and throng:
Thy will condense within thy soul
And turn to purpose strong.
But he who lets his feelings run
In soft, luxurious flow,
Faints when hard service must be done,
And shrinks at every blow.—Newman.

2. To trust God for protection is to wait under discouragements and disappointments for a desired issue of the affairs we commit to Him. “He that believeth will not make haste.” This the Lord pleads for. Men will have their desires precisely accomplished this year, this month, this week, or they will wait no longer. These, says God, are proud men; their

^bIsaiah 40:27-31.

hearts are lifted up in them; they trust not to me for protection. Men love to trust God (as they profess) for what they have in their hands, in possession, or what lies in an easy view; place their desires afar off, carry their accomplishment behind the clouds out of their sight, interpose difficulties and perplexities—their hearts are instantly sick. They cannot wait for God; they do not trust Him, nor ever did. Would you have the presence of God with you? Learn to wait quietly for the salvation you expect from Him. Then, indeed, is He glorified, when He is trusted as in a storm.—
John Owen.

CHAPTER 27

ISAIAH OF BABYLON (Continued)

(Isaiah)

Sorrows remembered sweeten present joy.—Pollok.

In this prophet's day, a new star to Israel was rising: the Persians were overrunning the country north and south of Babylon. Cyrus had ascended the throne of Persia about 551 B. C. He soon began a conquest along the coast of Asia Minor. Rich King Croesus controlled the whole of that country.

Ancient Greeks. Cyrus was likewise brought into contact in the western part of Asia Minor with Greek colonies. These Greeks were no doubt even this early in history more or less diffused throughout Babylon. They were a people of ready wit, of versatile talents, just such a class as the marauding kings of those days would want within their domain.

Besides, the Greeks were naturally ubiquitous, they were everywhere. They were a commercial people, an intellectual people, an artistic people, what we now call the most highly cultured people of antiquity because of their varied gifts and mental powers. It is much later than this, however, that they are brought into contact with the Jews. The rise of Cyrus of course was watched by the Jews, as

his traits of character were no doubt known to them. They felt that he certainly would not stop short of the conquest of Babylon. Indeed, Babylon would only be in his way if it were not taken by him.

Cyrus a Deliverer. Cyrus had been mentioned in the prophecies and the language of the ancient prophets. Jehovah had promised that he would raise up Cyrus as a deliverer of His people. Their old hope had suddenly been kindled anew; they had much to speculate about, and it is easy to imagine that they discussed the purposes of God and what God must shortly do for them. One of the greatest consolations of the human heart is the feeling that there is some kinship between the individual hopes and aspirations and the purposes of God. The prophet now challenges the gods of Babylon. He even taunts them:

“That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.

“Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob.

“Let them bring forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. * *

“Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you.

“I have raised up one from the north, and he shall

come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name: and he shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay. * * *

“Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion.”^a

“Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law.

“Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart.”^b

Jehovah comforts his people; he reminds them of their place in life:

“Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me.

“I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

“Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.”^c

That they may find in the new monarch, Cyrus,

^aIsaiah 51:20-29.

^bIsaiah 42:24, 25.

^cIsaiah 44:21-23.

reason for hope, He says: "He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid."^d

Cyrus a Wise Monarch. The coming of Cyrus was to all the nations subject to Babylon a source of great relief. He was a wise monarch; it is said that he worshiped all the gods. At any rate he respected the gods of the various peoples that he brought under his dominion. It would not be surprising that with the coming of such a man many Jews would find an excuse to remain where they were. With him came new feelings of safety, new commercial intercourse, and many opportunities of freedom in trading. But Israel must go:

"Go ye forth to Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob."^e

It was a new day for Jehovah's people. This great warm-hearted prophet exclaimed in the divine love which moved him to words and actions:

"Can a woman forget her child, that she should not have compassion on her son? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."^f

Here the prophet reminds Israel that if they would know their mission in life they must look to their ancestors, to those from whom they sprang as

^dIsaiah 44:28.

^eIsaiah 48:20.

^fIsaiah 49:15.

an index to God's purposes. How true the general principle is that men fashioned in life for some definite purpose, become in time the index to their children's conduct. We all owe something to our birth. 'We are indebted to those whose calling should in some measure be an index to our course in life, a goad to action. We may therefore conclude that we have a double duty in life, first to keep ourselves individually in harmony with God's purposes; and second, to keep ourselves in harmony with the mission of those to whom we owe our existence.

"Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

"Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody."^g

Isaiah Arouses the People. To arouse the people was certainly a great work. It required the inspiration of a great man, a man sufficiently strong and great to carry so abundantly the Spirit of God in his heart.

"Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put

^gIsaiah 51:1-3.

on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.

“Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. * * *

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! * * *

“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.

“For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward.”^h

Now comes some of that beautiful philosophy that we get from experience rather than from reasoning. The Jews, during those unhappy days no doubt found themselves tempted to ask, if God was all-powerful, why He permitted His people to be so cruelly oppressed. They had suffered, and their suffering was known to the prophet, because he was among them. It was known to him because God opened to the vision of his mind the secret questionings of their heart. But why must they suffer? Why is suffering necessary?

To bring light into the soul of man and make him feel and sense the touch of God's favor. All do not

^hIsaiah 52:1, 2, 7, 11, 12.

suffer: it is not given to all to know the glory of God nor reflect to the world that spiritual knowledge that comes so abundantly from a people in the depth of their sufferings. The whole history of the people of Israel was in some measure typical of the Son of God.

Sublime Chapter. Now follows what must be to the minds of many perhaps the sublimest chapter in all Isaiah, if not in all the Old Testament. Israel is represented as a man of sorrow. They had come up even as Christ came up. They were not sought and greeted of the world,—neither was the chosen Messiah.

“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

“For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have

turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

“He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

“And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

“Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”ⁱ

This was the Messiah. Isaiah was the great prophet of His coming. Isaiah's words are not only

ⁱIsaiah 53:1-12.

filled with love and inspiration unbounded, but they teach us some of the most beautiful lessons of wisdom.

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”^j

Conception of God. Israel, in the childhood of the nation, had come into the conception of God very much as a child comes into the conception of a parent. In the early history of that people Jehovah was their Redeemer, their protector. With them His glory was in His power and His preservation. If these were not manifest, they did not behold His glory, and fell away into idolatry. The prophets of this later period brought into their minds a higher conception of God's great love. If they had learned the severity of His punishments, they began now to feel the joy of His mercies; the one was as great and exalted as the other was painful.

It is hard to take one's departure from Isaiah. His comforting words, his assurances of divine love, have brought unbounded comfort to the human heart. Few books in all the world are read by those who would enjoy divine favor like the book

^jIsaiah 55:7-9.

of Isaiah. How the Jews love that book! How familiar its words are to them! What comfort it brings to their lives! Those in sorrow seek perhaps before all others this great prophet of the Old Testament. His words are among the very best revelations of God to man. They have opened the human heart, and made its conditions manifest as no other book has ever done. Go into the home in foreign lands, of those who have great sorrows to bear. You will often find on the shelf the sacred Bible, and its leaves part at the memorable words contained in these chapters.

The young may not care for Isaiah. It is not a book of mirth. But men seek him in their sorrows, for Isaiah is the friend of the distressed, of the sorrowful. How many hearts have felt the healing balm of his wonderful inspiration we shall never know, but we may safely believe that they number millions.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who were the Persians?
2. Who were the Greeks?
3. When did Cyrus ascend the Persian throne?
4. How did Isaiah comfort the people?
5. How was Christ's coming foretold by Isaiah?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What relation does comfort bear to sorrow?
2. What educational value has suffering?

NOTE

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B. C. the Jews were to be found in three great centers—Egypt, Babylonia,

and Palestine. Egypt, because of its friendly attitude toward the Jews and its nearness to southern Palestine, was the refuge to which most of the Jewish fugitives fled. Inasmuch as the approach of the Chaldean armies was from the north, the main highway running south from Hebron through the solitary desert was the most natural line of escape. The result was that a very large proportion of the Jewish race were to be found from this time on in the land of the Nile. Even before the final destruction of Jerusalem, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel addressed the Jewish refugees in Egypt.—Kent.

CHAPTER 28

DANIEL

When a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

The Jews in exile must have had many gifted sons whose superior intelligence and wisdom brought them into the favor of the Babylonian monarchs. Their humiliation in exile had the sting taken from it by the honors and employments that came to the children of God in those trying hours of their lives. The Jews, like many an individual, and like many another nation, did not realize the value of their blessings until they had been lost. They learned to love Jerusalem and to love God in a foreign land as they had not learned to love them in their home of divine promise and in the bounteous blessings of Jehovah. What a wonderful teacher sorrow is! Why does sorrow teach us? How does it teach us? Could we learn the same lesson without it?

Among those taken away into captivity was a certain Daniel, said to have been carried away from Jerusalem in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was one of four princely children whose stately appearance and bearing the king of Babylon would improve by a certain kind of prescribed diet. These children of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael,

and Azariah. Their names, however, were changed so as to give them a Babylonish covering and take away the offensive Jewish accent. They were therefore given other names in the land of their conquerors: Belteshazzar to Daniel; Shadrach to Hananiah, Meshach to Mishael, and Abednego to Azariah. As the king's diet consisted largely of wine and meat, Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself by it, and pleaded with the eunuch with whom he found favor that he might keep the simple diet to which he had no doubt been accustomed, the diet of his Jewish life. At the end of a period of ten days a test was made of Daniel and the princes. So improved was their appearance that they were permitted to live in the enjoyment of their own simple diet. The Bible says that they were "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm" in wisdom and understanding.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream. Daniel was brought very prominently before Nebuchadnezzar in consequence of a remarkable dream of the king which he could not remember, and which his astrologers therefore could not interpret. The dream evidently worried the king, who very unreasonably insisted that though he could not call it to mind his wise men should do so for him. In his angry frame of mind the king sent forth a decree that his wise men should be put to death, and Daniel was sought among them. In a vision of the night the secret of the king's dream was revealed to the prophet, a

most remarkable dream indeed, as it was made known to the king.

“Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible.

“This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of **brass**.

“His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.

“Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.

“Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.”^a

Dream Interpreted. The interpretation of the dream is given at some length; a verse or two here must suffice.

“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms; and it shall stand for ever.

“Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was

^aDaniel 2:31-35.

cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure."^b

The little stone cut out of the mountain without hands was the rise of the chosen people, the Latter-day Saints.

Daniel naturally gained favor in the sight of the king, and became a great man. He was made a ruler over the whole province of Babylon. Nor did Daniel forget his faithful friends, the three Hebrew children, who were likewise elevated to office. It may be said here in passing that Nebuchadnezzar was indeed a most remarkable man. Language was put into his mouth, and utterances were delivered by him that are so in harmony with Hebrew prophecy that he stands at times almost like one of the favored Israelites of old.

Fiery Furnace. This exaltation of the king was more than he could endure, and his pride grew upon him, so that he made a great image of gold about ninety feet high and nine feet broad (Note). It was an image which all were commanded to worship. When the cry of the herald and the announcement of the music warned the men to bow before this image, the three Hebrew children refused to do so, and as a punishment they were cast into a fiery fur-

^bDaniel 2:44, 45.

nace, but they were unburned. The king said to one of his counselors :

“Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”^c

The persons of this miracle were promoted to high places of honor.

Another Dream. Again Nebuchadnezzar dreamed, and he saw in the vision of his mind “a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great.

“The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth.

“The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the fields had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.”^d

Again Daniel was called to interpret this remarkable dream.

“This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which is come upon my lord the king:

“That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the

^cDaniel 3:25.

^dDaniel 4:10-12.

Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”^e

The interpretation by the prophet concluded with these beautiful words of counsel:

“Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor: if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility.”^f

So the king lost his reason and the glory of his kingdom departed from him until the time of God’s judgment was fulfilled. We are not told in the book of Daniel about the passing of Nebuchadnezzar.

Writing on the Wall. We are introduced to Belshazzar, the new king, who evidently profited nothing by what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar; he disregarded the ordinances and the worship of Jehovah by taking the sacred vessels which had been carried away from the temple in Jerusalem and using them in his revelry at night for drinking wine out of them. There appeared upon the wall of the palace a writing, “and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.”

This brought to the riotous king consternation, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished. The queen now reminded him that there was a man in the kingdom who could interpret these words. Here Daniel points to the misfortune that had overtaken Nebuchadnezzar who had to learn “that the Most High God ruled in the king-

^eDaniel 4:24, 25.

^fDaniel 4:27.

dom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.^g * * *

“And this is the writing that was written, Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.

“This is the interpretation of the thing: Mene; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

“Tekel; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

“Peres; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. * * *

“In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.”^h

Daniel in the Lion's Den. Daniel was exalted to high office under the new king. It was not only a new king, but a new nation, with its peculiar laws and government. It was the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, whose laws were unalterable, as they were often very severe. Daniel's promotion soon brought upon him the jealousy and hatred of a class of princes who sought to find favor with the new king by creating in his mind enmity toward Daniel, and a decree was set forth that any man that should “ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.”ⁱ

Daniel knew of this decree, but as usual went to his house, and before the open windows prayed with his face turned toward Jerusalem, three times a day,

^gDaniel 5:21.

^hDaniel 5:25-28, 30.

ⁱDaniel 6:7.

as was his custom. It was the law of the Medes and Persians, and whatever regret the king might have, they called his attention to the fact that a decree was unchangeable. The king comforted Daniel by the expressed belief that the God whom he worshiped would save him. And after Daniel was thrown into the den of lions, "the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

"And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"^j

To see Daniel alive, the king was "exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."^k

Chapters seven to twelve give the visions of Daniel, about which volumes have been written in speculation. The book of Daniel is sometimes spoken of as an Apocalypse of the Old Testament, sometimes as one of the Major Prophets, sometimes one of the Minor Prophets.

Effect of Daniel's Writings. The book of Daniel starts with the history of the prophet in the Babylonian exile and covers a period down to 165 B. C. The religious writings of this prophet have had a

^jDaniel 6:20.

^kDaniel 6:23.

wonderful effect, not only upon the Jews in Daniel's time, but upon religious feeling throughout subsequent centuries. His loyalty to his religion and to Jehovah has been seized upon by people under similar trials to those of the Jews as an object lesson and guide for their own conduct.

The temple at Jerusalem had been destroyed in the year 586 B. C., which event was a source of great disappointment to the Jews, who had believed that God would never permit its destruction. They felt that He was bound to protect it, and that His promise and the worship of Him were so bound up in the existence of the temple that it must stand forever whatever the people themselves did. Even that was not the most trying condition of Jewish life in those days; efforts were made to exterminate the Jewish religion itself. There were sufferings in those days which beggar description, and the examples of Daniel in the lion's den and the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace gave heart to people throughout all those terrible days.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who were the favored Hebrew children mentioned in Daniel?
2. What was the dream of the image which Daniel interpreted?
3. How do Latter-day Saints interpret the "little stone"?
4. Why were the Hebrew children thrown into the fiery furnace?
5. Give an account of how Daniel came to be placed in the lions' den.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is it never safe to conclude that because God intervened in one case for a certain man He would likewise intervene in another case for another man in a similar manner?
2. Give your own interpretation of Daniel's interpretation of the image.

NOTES

1. Pride seeks to lower others, because it seeks to raise self. The wish to exalt self leads to the wish to see one's neighbor humbled. The presence of pride discloses itself in subtle and unexpected ways. Why do we take pleasure in our neighbor's misfortunes? Is it not the strange sensation of satisfaction with which we feel the pulse of our unsubdued pride? This uncanny but pleasing thrill is the wicked chuckle of our pride. On this platform stands La Rochefoucauld's cynical saying: "We have all enough patience to bear our neighbour's misfortunes." "Pride," as Thomas Aquinas writes, "is said to be the love of our own excellence, in so far that out of love arises an overweening presumption of our right to overtop others, which fitly belongs to pride."—Boyd Carpenter.

2. "The Lord is a God of knowledge," says a solemn Scripture, "and by him actions are weighed." That is to say, you will be weighed in those scales of God by means of which He gets at the very heart's blood of all your actions. Till He has got at the very heart's blood, till He has got at the thoughts and intents of an action, at its most secret motive, He is not yet a God of knowledge. But after that He is. You deceive us, you, and your actions both pass with us for what at your heart you are not. But God is not mocked. He knows your exact weight and worth; and the exact weight and worth of all your words and all your deeds. He knows down to the bottom why you did this; and down to the bottom why you did not do that. He has known it all the time, only He has numbered your kingdom, and He lets you go on, deceiving and being deceived, till the Persian is at your gate.—A. Whyte.

CHAPTER 29

EZRA

It is human nature to hate those whom we have injured.—Tacitus.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which contain an account of the return of the Jews from their exile in Babylon (Note 1), were in early times regarded as one book divided into two parts. There can hardly be any doubt that Nehemiah, who writes the story of his mission to Judah, is the author of the book which now bears his name. Modern criticism has been very searching, but to most people who are not scholars in the Hebrew language, it is not very satisfactory. The criticism is often based upon the style and peculiarities of an ancient language which the great masses of the people do not understand. When translated, the Bible does not present to the ordinary reader all the differences in details of style that are claimed for the original by Bible scholars of the day.

The story of Ezra is devoid of stirring incidents, and may, for convenience, be divided into two parts: first, chapters one to six; and second, chapters seven to ten.

It would be quite natural in both Ezra and Nehemiah that some mixture of language took place,

The Hebrews, who had lived nearly seventy years among the Chaldeans, must naturally have learned to speak the Chaldean language, and there would quite likely be a mixture of words between the Hebrew and the Chaldean. The Jews, however, held tenaciously to their mother tongue which they have always loved throughout the whole history of their race with a peculiar fondness, even though circumstances may have deprived them of the privilege of using it.

Hope Fulfilled. “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying.

“Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of Heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

“Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (he is the God), which is in Jerusalem.

“And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

“Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah

and Benjamin and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.”^a

Here it will be noticed that with Judah was the tribe of Benjamin. It would be natural that also in the tribe of Judah some of the tribe of Simeon that was located just south of Judah, should be found. In first Chronicles, chapter 9, verse 3, we are informed that in Jerusalem dwelt all the children of Judah, and all the children of Benjamin, and all the children of Ephraim and Manasseh.

This statement supports that contained in the Book of Mormon which reveals to us the fact that the Nephites, who sprang from the little band of men and women that left Jerusalem at the time of its fall, were descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh. They were not a part of the Jewish race, for Jerusalem at that time was supposed to contain only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. It is not unlikely, however, that these two tribes constituted the great bulk of the people. It is quite believable that Cyrus was brought into contact with Daniel, and that Daniel drew his attention to the prophecies of Isaiah.

Of this return of the exiles, Josephus says, “Many remained in Babylon, since they were disinclined to relinquish their property.” We may therefore conclude that those who went back to their beloved city were men who loved God and were willing and ready to make almost any sacrifice for His glory.

^aEzra 1:1-5.

Great provisions were made for the return of the Jews:

“Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods. * * *

“All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.”^b

Children of the Province. Chapter two of Ezra gives an account of “the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which were carried away.” The “children of the province” were of course those who belonged to Judah, which was no longer a kingdom, but a province of Persia. The Israelites who returned to Palestine are therefore made distinct from those who remained in Babylon and Persia. And they “came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city,” that is the city of his forefathers.

Many of the cities had been destroyed. It is doubtful if those who remained behind when the Jews went into captivity ever rebuilt more than a few of them. At the head of the list of returning builders was Zerubbabel, a secular ruler, a sort of prince. Second in the list came Joshua, who was the high priest. There is also a statement that among them came “the children of Solomon’s servants.” These may probably have been descend-

^bEzra 1:7, 11.

ants of the Canaanitish people whom Solomon brought into forced labor.

“And the Tirshatha (governor, Zerubbabel) said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim”^c (Note 1).

Number that Returned. According to the statement of Ezra, after recounting the families,

“The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore.

“Besides their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women.”^d

Of live stock they had seven hundred and thirty-six horses, two hundred forty-five mules, four hundred thirty-five camels, and six thousand seven hundred twenty assess. This was of course in men and chattels only a remnant of those who were carried into captivity. The increase in birth would have accounted for more than are given in the above enumeration. For their travels the people of Babylon made generous provision:

“They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia. * * *

^cEzra 2:63.

^dEzra 2:65.

“And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. * * *

“But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

“So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.”^e

Jerusalem a Loved City. To those whose memories carried them back to the days of Jerusalem, that ruined city must have been a sad sight. There has always been something about Jerusalem which has kept it in the loving memory of its children. The poets and prophets of the Israelites have sung for centuries of its glory, its beauty, its greatness, and they have loved it because Jehovah loved it. They would be untrue to their God if they did not have an affection for that which was the object of God's mercy and His joy.

Christ also loved that city. It was the heart of the Jewish world. No city under the heavens has received in song and story the adoration which throughout time has come to Jerusalem. Even now men wander back to the sacred place that they may

^eEzra 3:7, 10, 12, 13.

approach within the shadow of its walls. The love of the orthodox Jew for this city of his God is past belief, almost past comprehension.

Every Friday afternoon, even to this day, crowds of Jews gather outside of the walls of the city on Mount Moriah, the hill on which the temple stood, and read Lamentations and certain passages from Isaiah. The story of Jerusalem has gone home to the heart of every faithful Christian. It is perhaps the best known story in history.

We may know, then, how these poor returning exiles felt when they looked upon the heap of ruins that greeted their eyes. They had sat by the rivers in Babylon, talked of Jerusalem, and wept.

The Samaritans. The Jews took up their work, the rebuilding of a temple unto the God of Israel. There came to them, however, at that time, their adversaries the Samaritans, and asked the privilege from Zerubbabel to take part in rebuilding the city and its temple.

“For,” said they: “we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.”^f

The Samaritans are still in the land, a remnant of them, perhaps less than 200 at the present time, in the old town of Shechem. They have a very ancient Bible and a synagogue in which they meet. They are very anxious that travelers should see

^fEzra 4:2.

their Bible and believe that it is more reliable than the Bible of the Jews.

Who are these Samaritans, this little handful of people? There really seem to have been three little colonizations made by the Assyrians in Samaria. The first colonization would be by Sargon, who replaced the captives by colonists from Babylon and Hamath. After this there were settlers from a certain Arabian element, and later still Ashur-hadam, grandson of Sargon, put colonists there from various parts of the empire, especially from the lowlands of the Mesopotamia. It will be seen from this that these Samaritans were a greatly mixed race. Zerubbabel, however, and the rest of the chiefs of the fathers were unwilling to accept of their help and said,

“Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus of Persia hath commanded us.”^g

Of course with this rejection of the offer of the Samaritans trouble began; but the Israelites were brought up under trouble; the Jews have had no end of trouble; they are “a man of sorrow”. Even now in Poland they are the objects of bitter hatred, and their condition of life is said to be most pitiful.

Jews Accused by Samaritans. The Samaritans, if they could not dictate a friendship, could at least interpose hostility and delay, so they hired counsel-

^gEzra 4:3.

ors against the Jews "to frustrate their purposes." They might bribe Persian officials in the court to intercept the work, and give the Jews all possible annoyance. A new reigning monarch on the Persian throne received an accusation made by the Samaritans against Judah and Jerusalem, and later letters were written also to Artaxerxes, setting forth the disloyalty of the Jews towards the Persian empire.

The Samaritans, who had sent for a priest that they might be taught in the religion of the Jews soon after they were settled in the country of Samaria, naturally felt very rebellious towards those who they thought ought to be brethren. They were determined, however, to put every impediment in the way of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and in their petition to the king they said:

"Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations."^h

These malcontents also asked the king to look up the records of these Jews to determine whether or not they were really a rebellious people; the records would prove their contention. Of course this was an argument that was not the truth. The Jews were schooled under different conditions. They came up loyally and began the reconstruction of their new city.

^hEzra 4:12.

“Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes’ letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power.

Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.”ⁱ

At this period in the history of Israel there appeared two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, whose words will be considered at the end of the present narrative. In the time of Darius, about 520 B. C., Zerubbabel began again to build the house of God at Jerusalem, and with the builders were the prophets. The Jews had been loyal; this interruption was extremely annoying to them.

Unhappy History. It may be well here in passing to note that no people in the world has ever undergone the trying ordeals that from the beginning of their distinct national birth to the present day, a period covering more than 2500 years, have befallen the house of Judah. The book of Deuteronomy gives to the world the consequences that would come to them through disobedience of God’s law and the rejection of His requirements for 2500 years. They have been subject to hostilities, enmities, race hatreds, persecutions, drivings, cruelties, horrible sufferings such as have befallen no other people, perhaps in one ten-thousandth degree.

The story of the poor Jews today in Poland is a

ⁱEzra 4:23, 24.

repetition of their unhappy history everywhere. They have borne, it would seem, almost enough sorrow for the whole human race; they are God's chosen people; they have their mission to perform. No one may ever know the value of their sorrows to us, or their place in the lessons which their history teaches to the world. They have behind them a greater history than any other people that has ever lived. Their history is more universally known to mankind. Truly they occupy a very remarkable place in the purposes of Jehovah.

Governor's Requirements. It seems strange that in those days their hearts should be inclined towards the kings of Persia. Their governor made certain requirements; among them, he said that they might "offer sacrifices of sweet savors unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and his sons."^j

When they were carried away into captivity the Prophet Jeremiah, after requiring them to seek the peace of the city where they were carried as captives, he admonished that they pray unto the Lord for it, "for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." Since that day it has been a practice more or less common among them to pray for the nations among whom they have sojourned.

After the temple was finished it was dedicated by a sacrifice of a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs. Compared to the dedication of Solomon's temple, this dedication was a very

^jEzra 6:10.

insignificant affair in matters of display. It was a very humble effort from the point of view of material considerations—a most inconsiderable affair.

“The priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the pass-over for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.”^k

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Of what do Nehemiah and Ezra give an account?
2. In what way does chapter 9 verse 3 of Chronicles support the Book of Mormon?
3. How many returned from the exile?
4. What was the adoration of the Jews for Jerusalem?
5. Why did the Jews refuse the Samaritans the latter's request to help build the Temple at Jerusalem?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What reason have you to believe that there was more than one Urim and Thummim?
2. Mention the greatest persecutions that have befallen the Jews since the days of Ezra.

NOTES

1. Urim and Thummim.—These denote the two essential parts of the sacred oracle by which in early times the Hebrews sought to ascertain the will of God. Our Old Testament revisers give as their meaning “The Lights and the Perfections.” This rendering—or rather, taking the words as abstract plurals, “Light and Perfection”—seems to reflect the views of the late Jewish scholars to whom we owe the present vocalization of the Old Testament text; but the oldest reference to the sacred lot suggests that the words express two sharply contrasted ideas. Hence if Thummim, as most believe, denotes “innocence”, Urim should denote “guilt”—a sense which some would give it by connecting it with the verb meaning “to curse”. Winckler and his follow-

^kEzra 6:20.

ers, on the other hand, start from "light" as the meaning of Urim and interpret Thummim as "darkness", the completion of the sun's course. Urim and Thummim are life and death, yes and no, light and darkness.—A. Jeremias.

2. The overthrow of the Chaldean Empire by Cyrus in 538 B. C. gave the Jews of Babylon an opportunity to return, for the Persian king reversed the policy of the Assyrians and the Babylonians and aimed to develop the resources and loyalty of each of the many peoples in his great empire. There is no evidence, however, that more than a handful of the Jews in the east improved this opportunity. Cyrus also adopted the policy of appointing native princes as local governors. A scion of the royal house of David was placed over the little sub-province of Judah. This appointment gave the Jews a local government that undoubtedly attracted to the homeland many refugees from Ammon and Moab and especially the land of Egypt. But the sermons of the contemporary prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, indicate clearly that those who constituted the rank and file of the Judean community and rebuilt the temple were the people of the land and that a general return of the exiles was an event, still in the future for which they ardently longed.—Kent.

CHAPTER 30

EZRA (Continued)

If thou wouldst marry wisely, marry thine equal.
—Ovid.

After the temple had been finished in the reign of Artaxerxes, a great scribe, Ezra, whose office now became an important landmark in Jewish history, went up to Jerusalem to join the exiles who had finished the house of God and were rebuilding the beloved city of Jerusalem. The period covered from the time of Darius, who granted the privilege of beginning work again on the temple, to the time of Artaxerxes, is said to be fifty-seven years. This makes a long break in the Book of Ezra. Some writers have undertaken to prove that the Book of Ezra is really the work of two distinct authors.

The Scribes. Who were the scribes that in later times became so famous in Jerusalem? They were no doubt translators, ready writers, a professional class, whose knowledge was demanded in the courts and among the leaders of the people. They were known in ancient Egypt at a very early date. They existed, in a small way, among the Jews in the days of the Judges, and although in the earliest his-

tory they were mere secretaries, they acquired in course of time a very distinct place as a powerful and influential class in the nations where they lived.

In ancient Israel it was their duty not only to copy the law, but they were also its interpreters. In Jeremiah, 8th chapter, we read of the scribes who say, "we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us." They also guarded very tenaciously the old records. They were the historians, and to them we owe much in retaining the old forms of language, the old customs, even the laws of Moses. Ezra, a scribe in the law of Moses, gives us the earliest instance of the great power that came into the hands of the class to which he belonged. We shall soon see that he really put the members of the priesthood into a position inferior to that which he occupied.

Ezra Commissioned by the King. Ezra came up to Jerusalem full of zeal for the law of the Lord. He expected to find there a devout people, worshipping Jehovah in a way that they could not worship Him elsewhere. The king had given to this scribe or priest Ezra a letter setting forth what he was authorized to do, that the people of Israel might know that he came with authority from the king.

"I make a decree," said the king, "that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own free-will to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.

"Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counselors, to inquire concerning Judah

and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand.”^a

What this inquiry was is not quite clear to us, Ezra had to carry up gold and silver and no doubt make certain inquiries as to the manner in which the laws of Moses were kept. It may have been a part of the general requirement of the Persians by which the king once a year sent inspectors to all the provinces.

“Also we certify you, that, touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.”^b

This was a very liberal exception that was made. Herein the Jews were more favored than they had been by previous Persian monarchs. Later on, this exception in the matter of toll was applied to Judah, but earlier all classes were compelled to pay it, especially as the priestly class was very numerous.

The decree of the king ends, and Ezra pours forth his gratitude in the words:

“Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.”^c

Ezra was a most zealous man. He might perhaps have obtained from the king an escort, but he says, “I was ashamed to require of the king a band of

^aEzra 7:14.

^bEzra 7:24.

^cEzra 7:27.

soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.

“So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us.”^d

Departure of Ezra. The treasures which had been committed to Ezra by the king were put under the charge of the chief priests, and the Levites to take with them to Jerusalem, and on the twelfth day of the first month they departed from the river of Ahava, one of the principal stations on the course of travel that they took in those days in a northwesterly direction, and then southwesterly down to Damascus into Palestine. The reason for this was that the Arabian desert exists far to the north and cannot be crossed by considerable bodies of men and women traveling together.

Sinful Marriages. Ezra met his surprise, and it was a source of anguish to his righteous soul. As a scribe he knew well the requirements of the Lord; he knew the Jews were forbidden to marry into the nations around them. Certain of the princes met him, saying:

“The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the

^dEzra 8:22, 23.

Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

“For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.”^e

Something had to be done; it was necessary to the preservation of Judah, and Ezra was determined to stamp out such an idolatrous practice.

“And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God.”^f

He was up in the temple precincts so that the people below might see him, and many no doubt heard him. Such a great trespass had not been committed in Israel for a long time. He reminds the people that now the Lord had granted them a little period of relief and grace, they had answered their God by defying one of His most holy ordinances. This did not look to Ezra as an effort on the part of the people to cleanse the land, which had become unclean through the filthiness of the people, and through the abominations of the heathens who had occupied it during the exile.

“Now therefore,” he implored them, “give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or

^eEzra 9:1, 2.

^fEzra 9:5.

wealth forever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.

“And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this:

“Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? Wouldst not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?”

“O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous; for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses; for we cannot stand before thee because of this.”^g

Ezra was full of repentance for the people; he himself had not committed this abomination, but he loved his people. Above all, he loved his God, and no trespass of divine commandments waned that love.

The People Repent. The people saw the great grief of their leader. They saw the spirit of humility that was upon him, they heard his pleadings with Jehovah. They felt the spirit of repentance which possessed him for the people, and therefore were ready to accept his commandments and his decisions in the matter. He required of the leaders of the people an oath that they wou'd do according to his words. They thereupon “made proclamation

^gEzra 9:12-15.

throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem;

“And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

“Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and for the great rain.

“And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.

“Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.

“Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.”^h

The people were there in great numbers, there were heavy rains, they were not able to stand out in the inclement weather, so the inclemency of the weather and the fear of their leader had their strong influences upon the multitude.

Sinful Marriages Dissolved. So they decided

^hEzra 10:7-12.

upon a plan by which the women were to be separated from their husbands and husbands from their wives in all cases of mixed marriages.

“And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month.”ⁱ

These men had put their wives away. Decrees of divorce were made out and given to the people. It was no doubt a painful occasion among the Jews. For a large number of years they had accustomed themselves to the companionship of wives that were not of their race, in disobedience to the commands of Moses. It had been in earlier times before the captivity, a too common practice among them. The practice, in the judgment of Ezra, must not be repeated, and there were very distinct reasons why there should thereafter be comparatively no intermarriages with the surrounding tribes.

Judah had been chosen out of the twelve tribes of Israel to be the ancestry of the Son of God. They must be kept distinct, not only until the appearance of the Messiah, but throughout all time, and never be allowed through intermarriages to lose their race identity. To the law of exclusiveness, the Jews have adhered with remarkable fidelity even down to the present day. Even now they do not countenance intermarriage. It is offensive to them, and throughout all these centuries, they have maintained a distinctness that has given them a race pride that belongs to no other class of people.

ⁱEzra 10:17.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the mission of Ezra?
2. How was Ezra surprised when he reached Jerusalem?
3. What did Ezra require of the people in the matter of marriage?
4. For what purpose was Judah chosen out of the twelve tribes?
5. What is the present attitude of the Jews on inter-marriage?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Ezra forbade that the Jews seek the "peace" of the surrounding nations. Is there a peace that tempteth man from serving God?
2. What advantage came to the Jews by giving up their heathen wives?

NOTE

The Law was something more than a system of restraint and condemnation. It contained an element of progress. Under the tutelage of his pedagogue the boy is growing up to manhood. At the end of its term the Law will hand over its charge mature in capacity and equal to the responsibilities of faith. Judaism was an education for Christianity. It prepared the world for the Redeemer's coming. It drilled and moralized the religious youth of the human race. It broke up the fallow-ground of nature, and cleared a space in the weed-covered soil to receive the seed of the Kingdom. Its moral regimen deepened the conviction of sin, while it multiplied its overt acts. Its ceremonial impressed on sensuous natures the idea of the Divine holiness; and its sacrificial rites gave definiteness and vividness to men's conceptions of the necessity of atonement, failing indeed to remove, but awakening the need and sustaining the hope of its removal. —Findlay.

CHAPTER 31

NEHEMIAH

It is never too late to return from the error of our ways.

He who repents of his sins is almost innocent.

Nehemiah was not among those first exiles who came up under the leadership of Zerubbabel. He had remained back in the land of his captivity. He was at the time mentioned in the beginning of his book, at Susa, or, as he puts it, Shushan, one of the capitals of the Persian empire. It appears there were Jewish travelers between Jerusalem and Mesopotamia. They would naturally go back to see their relatives and old-time friends whenever an opportunity came. Some of the Jews from Jerusalem brought discouraging news of the condition of that city. The Samaritans had succeeded in stopping its reconstruction for a season. This sad news brought the spirit of sorrow upon Nehemiah, who was the king's cup-bearer.

“And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.

“And said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant

and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: (Note 1)

“Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel, thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned.

“We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

“Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

“But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. * * *

“And prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king’s cup-bearer.”^a

Nehemiah Before the King. It happened that when Nehemiah stood before the king with wine that the king discovered a change in the appearance of this servant.

^aNehemiah 1:4-9, 11.

“Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid,

“And said unto the king, Let the king live forever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father’s sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?”^b

Nehemiah, to be sure, had some misgivings because the Medes and Persians were very severe in their rules and regulations, and it was often said when a thing was fixed certain and unalterable that it was “like the laws of the Medes and Persians.” The servants of the king were expected to be joyful, pleased, and of happy demeanor. It was a very serious request to ask to leave the king’s court; it was a sort of disloyalty, and hence the hesitation of Nehemiah. However, he was fearless in expressing his grief, and he was bold enough to ask the king to send him to Judah that he might build again the city of his fathers, or at any rate repair the walls and put up the gate thereof.

Nehemiah wanted to go fully equipped, so he asked the king for letters to different governors along the route beyond the river that he might be received and respected on his journey. He also asked for a letter to one Eliashib, that he might obtain timbers with which to make beams for the

^bNehemiah 2:2, 3.

gate. When Nehemiah was near Jerusalem he met Sanballat, who appears to have been a leader of the Samaritans. You remember that Samaria was only about thirty miles north of Jerusalem. He also met Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite. These leaders were very much disappointed in the appearance of Nehemiah, whose mission was the success of the children of Israel.

Nehemiah in Jerusalem. Nehemiah, however, came on to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

“And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.

“And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.

“Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king’s pool; but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.

“Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.”^c

After making this examination of the walls of the city of Jerusalem, Nehemiah calls the attention of the people to the condition of the walls and city, and says,

^cNehemiah 2:12-15.

“Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. * * *

“But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king?”^d

Sanballat no doubt felt more concerned about the rivalry of Jerusalem to the city of Samaria than anxiety for the loyalty of the Jews to the king of Persia. It would appear that the city of Samaria enjoyed some measure of prosperity after the captivity of Judah, and naturally there would be jealousy on the part of the people of Samaria when they heard that Jerusalem was likely to be rebuilt. Before its destruction, Jerusalem had been the glory of the Jewish world. It was the most beautiful city in all the country round. If it were rebuilt and its glory again established, the city of Samaria would occupy in the future a very inferior place.

Work of Rebuilding Begun. The work on the walls of the city began by the distribution of the labor to the different cities surrounding it of those parts which they were to rebuild, the inhabitants working on the part of the wall from which they came. Thus, the people from Jericho were put on the east side. We are not informed just how much of the walls of the city really had been torn

^dNehemiah 2:17, 19.

down. It must be remembered that these walls would be nearly four miles in length.

The material was close at hand so that the work could be taken up and accomplished without very great delay. Wherever the walls were broken down there would be great piles of rubbish and a large amount of work would be necessary to clean up around the broken places and get the foundations in good condition so that the wall might be built upon them. It would be quite natural that as the work progressed day after day, and the debris had been carried away, and the city cleaned up and given a new life and a new shape, some jealousy would arise among the Samaritans. Sanballat took offense from the first at what the Israelites were doing. We are told in the scriptures that he mocked them,

“And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones, out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?

“Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

“Hear, O our God; for we are despised and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them a prey in the land of captivity.”^e

Nehemiah was very ready for the swift punish-

^eNehemiah 4:2-4.

ment of his enemies. He would have them taken away into captivity and suffer the punishment of Jehovah.

“But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth.

“And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.”^f

Jews Not Enthusiastic. There does not seem to have been any very great enthusiasm among the Jews generally in this work, and it might have dragged along for a greater length of time had not these enemies of the Jews, these Samaritans, Edomites, Arabians, and others, brought their opposition to bear and thus brought the Jews together in a united effort. These different tribes about them thus became a menace, so that the Jews were required to defend themselves against the attacks of those who might come upon them by surprise. They were therefore obliged to work with shields and bows in their hands.

“For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.

“And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.

^fNehemiah 4:7, 8,

“In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.

“So we labored in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.

“Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labor on the day.

“So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.”^g

In those days there would naturally be much opportunity for speculation. As the Jews returned little by little to the land of their forefathers, the land was brought more and more into demand. It became by the presence of each new colony of settlers of greater value. Those who were poor were often compelled to sell their small holdings, and those who had money bought them up. Then there were those who were money lenders and in one way or another the people were brought into a system of bondage.

Tribute and Taxes. Furthermore, every year they were compelled to pay tribute to the king; this must be in gold and silver. To raise this tribute was a great effort for the poor. They were taxed more heavily in proportion than the rich; often the

^gNehemiah 4:18-23.

tax was so much per individual. Money must under such circumstances be borrowed. Large rates of interest were required, and in the midst of this work devoted to the Lord there grew up such oppression that Nehemiah was compelled to denounce the course of those who were oppressing the poor.

“Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth.

“There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king’s tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards.”

It appears from the law of Moses that parents were permitted to sell their sons and daughters into bondage, though at the time of the year of the Jubilee they might be redeemed. Of this condition Nehemiah says:

“And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words.

“Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them.

“And I said unto them, We after our ability, have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.

“Also, I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye

not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?

“I likewise, and my, brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury.

“Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them.”^h

What he means by the hundredth part of the money is not clearly understood unless he means the interest. It was believed by some writers that interest was payable monthly or taken at the rate of twelve per cent. The law generally disallowed the taking of interest from the Israelites. The money lenders were touched in their hearts, and promised to restore what they had obtained from the poor as required by Nehemiah.

“And I also shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labor, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise.”ⁱ

Nehemiah as Governor. Now Nehemiah was the governor of the people. He had along with him a court and a considerable number of followers to do his bidding. He was entitled, as their gov-

^hNehemiah 5:6-11.

ⁱNehemiah 5:13.

error, to support, which he did not require, as it meant additional burdens upon the people. He did not buy lands of those whose necessities compelled them to sell, and all the time he took his full share of the burden of building up the walls around the city. For twelve years, he says:

“Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor.

“But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, besides forty sheckels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God. * * *

“Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine; yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people.”^j

Nehemiah, the cup-bearer to the king, came to Jerusalem in the fulfillment of what he considered a sacred mission and duty. He was zealous for God and for the holy city of Jerusalem. From what we gather of those times, those that came with Zerubbabel must have cleared out just such parts of the

^jNehemiah 5:14, 15, 18

city as were immediately necessary for the building of homes. The city itself must have presented a tumble-down aspect. The houses had been razed to the ground, and the work of clearing the debris away would naturally be a very great one.

It is not uncommon in those ancient cities to see the people settled amidst ruins, winding their way through tortuous paths from the outskirts of the city to the homes within. They are almost like birds that build their nests in the waste places, or in the ruins of cities. The news of such a condition stung Nehemiah to the heart. With him it was a work of love, and to find in the midst of his efforts such a spirit of selfishness was wholly out of harmony with what it was in his heart to accomplish.

He had his commission as governor of Jerusalem; he was fully authorized by the king to do the work, and his authority was therefore complete. He was entitled to obedience, and he meant that as long as he possessed authority over Jerusalem his fortunate brother should not be permitted to reap advantages over the poor. As the work went on, and the breaches in the walls had been filled, and the places left open for gates were so built as to be ready to receive these doors of the walls, new opposition broke out on the part of Sanballat.

Message from Sanballat. When Nehemiah was completing his work there came from this unscrupulous man a message asking that Nehemiah meet him "in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono." This man was bent on mischief, and no doubt

intended to make trouble for Nehemiah, if not to take his life. The governor, however, had wisdom to foresee the danger and sent back a curt message saying that he had no time to leave his work. Four times this invitation had been sent to Nehemiah, and every time the same answer went back. The fifth time there came to the governor not only the messenger, but an open letter,

“Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words.

“And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together.”^k

It was the same old difficulty over again. Nehemiah promptly made denial of the accusation. It was recommended to the governor Nehemiah that he go into the house of God within the temple and shut the doors of it in order that he might protect himself from the enemy that it was thought would slay him:

“And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.”^l

He here evidently means that it was not lawful

^kNehemiah 6:6, 7.

^lNehemiah 6:11.

for any man to go into the interior of the temple, save the priests and the Levites, whose duty it was to enter and minister there.

“My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

“So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.”^m

This is a remarkably short time in which to complete the actual work. Josephus says that this repair occupied two years and four months. Nehemiah, however, speaks everywhere of repairs to be made upon the walls, but there is nothing inconsistent in his representations.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How was Nehemiah called to rebuild walls of Jerusalem?
2. Explain the condition of Jerusalem as Nehemiah found it.
3. Why did he forbid usury among the Jews?
4. Who was Sanballat?
5. How long did it take to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why have enemies always kept close on the heels of God's people in their divinely appointed task?
2. What was usury? What would it be in this age?

NOTE

Nehemiah perceived that God's mercy and His covenant go together, that the covenant does not dispense with the

^mNehemiah 6:14, 15.

need of mercy any more than it forecloses the action of mercy. When the covenant people fall into sin, they cannot claim forgiveness as a right; or can they ever demand deliverance from trouble on the ground of their pact with God. God does not bargain with His children. A Divine covenant is not a business arrangement, the terms of which can be interpreted like those of a deed of partnership, and put into force by the determinate will of either party. The covenant is, from the first, a gracious divine promise and dispensation, conditioned by certain requirements to be observed on man's side. Its very existence is a fruit of God's mercy, not an outcome of man's haggling, and its operation is just through the continuance of that mercy. It is true a promise, a sort of pledge, goes with the covenant; but that is a promise of mercy, a pledge of grace. It does not dispense with the mercy of God by converting what would otherwise be an act of pure grace on His part into a right which we possess and act upon of our own sole will. What it does is to afford a channel for the mercy of God, and to assure us of His mercy, which, however, remains mercy throughout.—W. F. Adeney.

CHAPTER 32

NEHEMIAH AND THE PROPHETS OF THE RETURN (Nehemiah)

Vice thrives and lives by concealment.—Virgil.

After Nehemiah had completed the wall and put it in satisfactory repair he gave over the government of Jerusalem to his brother Hanani, and Hananiah, ruler of the palace, for he says: "He was a faithful man, and feared God above many."

"And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house."^a

Jerusalem was large, four miles in circumference, but the inhabitants were few; probably at this time not more than fifty thousand persons had returned to Judea, and these were scattered from Bethel in the north to Beersheba in the south. Nehemiah undertook to get up a genealogy of those who had returned.

Ezra Reads the Law. During all this period of Nehemiah's activity, not a word is said about Ezra, the great scribe whose influence over the people was so powerful in his day. It may be that this wonderful scribe had returned to Babylon after his

^aNehemiah 7:3.

mission had been accomplished, and that he had remained there upwards of ten years. In the eighth chapter of Nehemiah it is said:

“All the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.”^b

Ezra then began, from a pulpit which was constructed for the purpose, to read the law to the people. This was the beginning of a form of worship that prevailed at the time of Christ's coming. It was likewise the beginning of an order of men known as the Scribes, whose influence upon the life of Israel as the interpreters of the law was most remarkable.

When the people heard Ezra read the law, they wept because of their condition brought about by their transgressions of the law. There gradually began to crystalize within their minds the conviction that all of their sorrows were brought about by their disregard for the laws of God. To avoid such calamities in the future, they took steps to remind the people constantly that God made certain requirements which must not thereafter be disregarded.

Feast of Tabernacles. The people further discovered that they had neglected to observe the great feast of the tabernacles. They also discovered that there had been in the celebration of that

^bNehemiah 8:1.

feast a practice of dwelling in booths made of willows and leaf branches. It is quite likely that their circumstances in captivity compelled them to forego the celebration of the feast of the tabernacles in this manner. They were commanded to

“Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.

“So the people went forth and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim.”^c

And thus began again a celebration which was zealously carried out. The writer says here that this had not been done since the days of Joseph. This is evidently a mistake, as the celebration of the feast of the tabernacles is referred to in Kings and in Ezra. It is probable he means that no such celebration, that is, in no such way, was kept. It is said that the celebration was held for eight days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly of people.

In the celebration of this grand feast the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. This was the beginning of a new zeal which has characterized the steadfast determina-

^cNehemiah 8:15, 16.

tion of the Jews from that day down to the present time.

Jerusalem Neglected. The city of Jerusalem, during the time of Nehemiah, suffered great neglect. People were rather disposed to live in the villages near by the lands which could be cultivated, so finally certain ones were called to go to the city, and they cast lots so that every tenth man gave up his home in the different parts of the province and came to the city to live. It was not an uncommon practice in those days to increase the population of certain cities by compelling men to move their homes. The Levites were compelled to take up again their duties with the priests in the administration of the temple service.

The people had returned to a ruined land. It was poor and they were poor, and the scanty living which the priests and Levites obtained in the temple service compelled them to seek employment in the country round. Nehemiah in his day likewise had to contend with the question of mixed marriages, and the law was read to the people wherein it was written that the Moabites "should not come into the congregation of God forever ;

"Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing."^d

Sabbath Neglected. They began again the process of the separation of the mixed multitude, send-

^dNehemiah 13:2.

ing the heathen wives back to their old homes; and thus they gave to their enemies a new offense. Another evil that Nehemiah found on his return from Babylon was the growing neglect of the Sabbath.

“In those days saw I in Judah some treading winepresses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold their victuals.

“There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.”^e

Against this practice Nehemiah contended vigorously. The gates were closed during the Sabbath day, and the people solemnly warned. He says,

“In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab; * * *

“And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.”^f

Haggai and Zechariah. During this period in the return of the exiles from Babylon, there ap-

^eNehemiah 13:15, 16.

^fNehemiah 13:23, 25.

peared two prophets, whose names are barely mentioned in Ezra as taking part in the work of restoring Jerusalem. They are here given in closing this period of Jewish history. Their names are Haggai and Zechariah. Of their personal history we know but little. According to tradition Haggai was born in Babylon and came up with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem. In urging upon the people their duty, he asks:

“Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?”^g

In contrasting the temple which they were just building with that which reflected the glory of Solomon, he says,

“Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?”^h

The prophet Zechariah writes at greater length. His book contains fourteen chapters, in contrast with two chapters of Haggai. He deals with more of the great questions of religion and morality, and speaks out from a greater fullness of the heart. He dwells, however, much upon the blessings of prosperity and the strength that comes through the divine spirit. In that vision of his mind, he says:

A Vision. “And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.

“And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord re-

^gHaggai 1:4.

^hHaggai 2:3.

buke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"ⁱ

But the angel saw that he found evil to rebuke when he said, "the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, saying,

"Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassion every man to his brother:

"And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

"But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear."^j

Again,

"And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord."^k

He bears a most remarkable testimony about the coming influence of Judah, and the high station in life to which they would yet be exalted (Note).

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."^l

ⁱZechariah 3:1, 2.

^jZechariah 7:8-11.

^kZechariah 8:17.

^lZechariah 8:23.

Of Christ's coming and greatness he also prophesies:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”^m

The prophet foresees likewise a time when Ephraim shall be joined to Judah. They were now separated: one of them off with the Ten Tribes to the north, the other returned to Jerusalem:

“And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the Lord their God, and will hear them.

“And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord.

“I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased.

“And I will sow them among the people: and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again.”ⁿ

This was the gathering of Ephraim; as elsewhere

^mZechariah 9:9.

ⁿZechariah 10:6-9.

declared, they had been scattered among the nations.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Whom did Nehemiah call to rule over Jerusalem in his place?

1. How did the people of Jerusalem protect themselves from the enemy without?

3. Why does the name of Ezra not appear during this active period when the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt?

4. Why did the people prefer to live in the country during these times?

5. How was the Sabbath treated in the time of Nehemiah?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What prophecies of Zechariah have distinct reference to our time?

2. The Lord says to the people: "Love no false oath." What particular meaning did that have with reference to the Jews?

NOTE

The Babylonian and Persian age as a whole was for the Jews a period of overwhelming calamity and discouragement, and yet during the latter part of this era scattered remnants of the race began again to restore the temple and capital city. During this era the foundations of Judaism were laid along the lines first outlined by Ezekiel. The priests and scribes succeeded to the earlier authority of the kings and prophets. Loyalty to the law and ritual took the place of the ancient loyalty to the king and state. Judaism, helpless and exposed to the attacks of its powerful foes, stood apart from the rest of the world, finding its joy more and more in worship, in trust in Jehovah, and in the noble ideals and hopes that are voiced in the psalms and wisdom writings of this period.—Kent.

CHAPTER 33

ESTHER

(Chapters 1-4)

A woman's honor rests on manly love.—Tegner.

The book of Esther gives us some further insight into the life of the Persians. The prophets in those days who wrote about the condition of the exiles in Babylon, dealt chiefly with conditions under the governments of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Daniel introduces us to the Persians, and the return of the Jews, which took place under the reign of the first Persian king, Cyrus.

Later on, however, in the days of Ahasuerus there arose a maiden of Jewish descent who became famous because of her relations to this king who in the Greek language was called Xerxes. In the third year of his reign, he made a feast for all his princes and servants. We are also informed that in the same year he gathered the leading men, the governors of the provinces of Assyria together, preparatory to an expedition against Greece.

We have here the introduction of a new nation with whom later on the Jews had extensive dealings, and who, in the course of time, exercised a considerable influence over Jewish life. We also have here the introduction of a Greek historian, Herodotus, who supplements some of the history of the Bible by his own writings.

The Greeks lived a long way from the capital of Persia. To reach them, all Asia Minor, from east to west had to be traversed, and then the Dardanelles, called the Hellespont, had to be crossed. It is through this narrow waterway that the English vainly tried to make their way into the Marmora Sea on the borders of which Constantinople is located. As we shall learn, the Persians were not successful in their efforts to conquer the Greeks. Persia had now in the time of Xerxes reached the highest point of glory in her national life.

King's Feast. The feast of the king, we are told, lasted one hundred and eighty days. We know from secular history, and especially from the Greek writer Herodotus, that feasts among the Persians were celebrated on a very extensive scale. It is said that as many as 18,000 people were entertained at one time at the king's table. It was also an occasion for the drinking of wine. It seems that the king, in a vainglorious moment, sent for his queen, Vashti, that she appear before the people that they might witness her beauty, "for she was fair to look on." To this message the queen returned her refusal. It was a somewhat extraordinary thing for the king to do, as in those days women were veiled, and were supposed to conceal their beauty from the gaze of the people.

The Queen's Humiliation. The Persians were perhaps among the ancient monarchs the most unrelenting in their commands. The decrees of the king, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, were unal-

terable, and woe to him who did not promptly yield. The question now arose as to what must be done with the queen. The king might not be resisted, and like such monarchs was susceptible to flattery. His princes and governors gathered round him and urged that Queen Vashti must be dealt with for her disobedience to a royal command. These governors gave as their reason the fears of her example among the wives of the leading men of the realm, and urged that she be disciplined. She was consequently dropped from her position, which was left vacant until filled in a rather remarkable way by another.

Esther Chosen. At this time, about 483 B. C., the maidens of the realm were ordered to appear before the king in order that a successor to Vashti might be chosen. It happened that among those summoned to the palace was a certain Jewish maiden whose name was Harasah, that is, Esther. She was an orphan that had been reared by Mordecai, a nephew to her father. It is said that the maiden pleased the king, and that "she obtained kindness of him." Esther was a Jewess, and though at this time there appears to have been no special animosity to the Jews, she did not let it be known that she belonged to this race. In this respect she followed the counsel of Mordecai, her guardian. In the course of time, according to Persian custom, she occupied the place of queen in the royal household:

"And the king loved Esther above all the women,

and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.”^a

Mordecai. Mordecai, it appears, was in those days an inferior officer of the king’s court and “sat in the king’s gate.” Here he learned of a conspiracy on the part of two of the chamberlains of the king “to lay hand” upon their master. This conspiracy he made known to Esther, who in turn let it be known to the king. The men were examined, found guilty, and hanged on a tree. Thus it appears that Mordecai saved the king, perhaps from assassination, as that is what it meant when it is said that they sought to “lay hand” on him.

The service of Mordecai to the king does not appear to have been rewarded promptly. This humble and faithful Jew still sat in the king’s gate. Over him and over all the household of the king was appointed Haman, an unworthy and cruel man. When this exalted officer passed the guards and other servants of the king, they bowed in reverence to him. It has been from time immemorial a practice of Orientals to bow down to the earth in abject servitude to those in authority above them.

We are led to believe that Mordecai did not prostrate himself because of his religion, and it may be that from this circumstance it came to be known that he was a Jew. However, the Greeks refused

^aEsther 2:17.

likewise to prostrate themselves as the people of Asia did. They were proud and independent and refused this token of humility because they considered it unmanly and it was contrary to their customs. While others yielded in such a menial attitude before Haman, they noticed that Mordecai was obstinate in his repeated refusals to bow to the great man. They naturally asked why all this difference?

When this contempt was pointed out to Haman, it is said that he was full of wrath, and was inclined at first to lay hands on the Jew and punish him. If, however, the Jew was acting as all others of his race would act under similar circumstances, why not destroy all the Jews within the realms of Persia?

Haman's Plot to Destroy the Jews. When Haman determined to punish all the Jewish race for what this man had done, he found it necessary to set apart a general day for the slaughter of all the Jews. As was customary among the Persians, lots were cast in order to determine which of all days in the year would be most favorable to their gods.

This lot in the Persian language was called Pur, and from it later there was celebrated the feast of Purim, as we shall see. After they had cast lots a day was finally fixed for the destruction of all the Jews throughout the empire. The king was asked to confirm Haman's resolve to strike down a race the representative of whom had grossly offended him. The day was fixed, the order issued, and

sealed with the king's ring. At this it became the unalterable law of the Medes and Persians.

Letters were then sent to the governors of the various provinces commanding them to kill all the "Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey."^b

The spoil thus became an inducement to kill. The Jews were doubtless more or less prosperous within the empire. It will be seen from the Scripture that the day fixed was a long way off. Why the delay? It may be that Haman thought that perhaps the Jews would take their flight from the empire in order to avoid a massacre of them, and that leaving their goods and chattles behind them they would contribute thereby to those of their neighbors who were, if necessary, willing to carry out the decree of the king.

Mordecai Mourns. This was a sad announcement to Mordecai, but he would not yield (Note 1). His resistance therefore not only threatened his life, but the life of all his brethren throughout the realm. No wonder he "put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry."^c

He came also to the king's gate; but in such a garb no one was allowed to enter. Nor was this

^bEsther 3:13.

^cEsther 4:1.

mourning confined to this solitary Jew. It was universal to Jews throughout the empire, who united in fasting and weeping and wailing. Such a cruel decree would naturally reach Esther; they were her people; Mordecai had been her guardian, her protector. She likewise mourned with others. But she was in a position to exercise an influence over the king.

Just when this custom of mourning in sackcloth with ashes began we do not know. It was common among the Orientals in those days and was practiced even among the Persians.

Esther now took steps to save her people. Communication continued between her and Mordecai. To the communication of her faithful protector she returned these words:

“Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish (Note 2).

“So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.”^d

Esther, while greatly favored and beloved of the king, yet knew the danger she was in if she intruded herself into his presence. One might, it is said, request an audience with the monarch, but if one went in to his presence uninvited there was a law

^dEsther 4:16, 17.

putting such person to death. The opportunity to meet the king was without immediate prospect. What could be done? The time could not be wasted. So she must act in some manner so adroit as not to give offense to her lord. Esther was not without tact, and not without wisdom in safeguarding her life as well as the lives of her people.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What brought the Persians into contact with the Greeks?
2. Who were the Greeks?
3. What first brought Esther into prominence?
4. Who was Haman?
5. Why did Haman seek the destruction of the Jews in Persia?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the far reaching effects of the persecution of the people of God?
2. What might have been the financial status of the Jews in Persia at the time of Esther?

NOTES

1. If patriotism is a virtue, and belongs to good morals in the Jewish and Christian systems, then the book has its place in the Bible, as teaching this virtue, even if everything else be absent. No book is so patriotic as the Book of Esther. Esther is the heroine of patriotic devotion. She is the incarnation of Jewish nationality, and thus is the appropriate theme of the great national festival of the Jews. And in all the Christian centuries Esther has been an inspiration to heroic women and an incentive to deeds of daring for heroic men.—Hastings.

2. Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,
Grant us the strength to labor as we know,
Grant us the purpose, ribbed and edged with steel,
To strike the blow.

Knowledge we ask not—knowledge Thou has lent,
But, Lord, the will—there lies our bitter need,
Give us to build above the deep intent
The deed, the deed. —Drinkwater.

CHAPTER 34

ESTHER (Continued)

(Chapters 5-10)

“Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they
grind exceeding small;

Though with patience He stands waiting, with
exactness grinds He all.”

—Von Logan.

The numerous court ceremonies of the eastern nations often created long delays in securing the attention of the authorities or an opportunity to lay before them requests and petitions. Queen Esther placed herself where the king might be attracted to the beautiful woman whom he so fondly loved. She was therefore invited into his presence.

“Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.

“And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him.”^a

This chief advisor and the man who had plotted the destruction of the Jews “went forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, that he stood not up nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.”^b

^aEsther 5:3, 4.

^bEsther 5:9.

This Jew seems to have been more stubborn now than ever. Formerly he would not bow; now he would not even rise in the presence of the chief officer of the king. Haman had been bidden to the banquet, and he little realized what was in the mind of Esther concerning him. However, Haman must be rid of Mordecai. He laid the matter of this Jew's resistance before his friends and before Zeresh, his wife.

“And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and now he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king.”^c

In those days a multitude of children was one of the greatest honors that could befall a man. It is said by the Greek historian, Herodotus, that it was next to the honors that befell a man for his bravery and accomplishments on the field of battle. Here in Persian history we are brought into contact with a character who is sometimes called the father of history, Herodotus. His writings give us a picture of the customs of those times. He traveled much, and made careful note of the peculiarities of the various people whom he visited. To him we are indebted for much of the history of the nations with whom the Jewish people were associated in those days.

For some reason, Esther did not seem able to bring her request before the king at the first ban-

^cEsther 5:11.

quet prepared for him and Haman. She therefore asked that she also have the pleasure of serving the king and his chief officer at a second banquet.

Haman Seeks Mordecai's Life. This honor to Haman flattered his pride greatly, but the pleasure occasioned by Esther's apparent attention was greatly disturbed by the conduct of Mordecai, whose death he now sought to bring about.

He was advised by his wife and his friends to build a gallows fifty cubits (seventy-five feet) high, that Mordecai might be hanged thereon. When this was accomplished, according to their statement, he might go into the banquet merrily and enjoy the association of the king and the queen. To the end that Mordecai might be hanged, Haman made his preparations. Hanging was not customary, the Greek historian tells us, in those days. It was more common to crucify or to impale persons whom they wished to execute.

However, an obstacle immediately came in the way of Haman. It appears that the king was greatly troubled in his sleep, and that he had brought before him the records, or so-called chronicles of the kings, and they were read before him. It is said that in those days the kings could not read; for that purpose they had their scribes. It was found in the records that Mordecai had sometime before informed the king about those who sought to encompass him. Now the king wanted to know what honor such a man should have.

It is strange that the reward of this loyalty

should be delayed, but such was a practice among the ancients. Sometimes the delay of a reward to which a man was entitled covered a period of years, often months, so the delay in the case of Mordecai was no unusual thing.

Haman's Mistake. The king, without letting his chief officer know who was to be honored, asked Haman what should be done to the man whom the king delighted to honor. Haman in his pride no doubt pointed to himself as the fortunate man, and he therefore recommended the most extravagant display, by suggesting to the king that "the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head:

"And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor.

"Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken."^d

Haman had prepared a high gallows for Mordecai; he must now endure the humiliation of honoring the man he sought to punish. But the decree

^dEsther 6:9, 10.

had gone forth; if he undertook to escape it it would result in the loss of his life. He therefore did as the king commanded. After all the brilliant ceremony was over, Mordecai went again to his place at the king's gate. "But Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered.

"And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him."^e

Esther's Petition—Haman Executed. While they were thus talking and bemoaning the unhappy event which had befallen him, announcement was made that Haman should appear again at the banquet of Queen Esther. At this second banquet the king again asked Esther what it was she would have, to which she replied in the beautiful language which follows:

"If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request:

"For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

"Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said

^eEsther 6:13.

unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?

“And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

“And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.

“Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face.”^f

Such covering of a man’s face and head before his execution was a common practice among the Greeks and Romans, but this, historians say, is the first mention made of it as a Persian custom. Haman was taken to the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and there he was hanged. Strange retribution! How often in the ordinary walks of life men fall into the pits which they dig for others.

In this story of Queen Esther and the king we find a pleasure-loving monarch swayed by the influence of the courtiers around him. Transferring authority to shirk the responsibilities belonging to it is a dangerous practice, either in secular or religious government. If one will follow carefully

^fEsther 7:3, 8.

the story of God's dealings with ancient Israel from the beginning of its national life in the days of Moses, one will find that God Himself safeguarded jealously the authority which He bestowed on those whom He had chosen. Violations of this authority, of its rights and duties, Jehovah was swift to punish. Authority in His kingdom was fundamental. Again and again men were put to death when they disregarded it or undertook to override it.

Mordecai Promoted. Haman, the author of the decree that went out declaring the destruction of the Jews, was dead. The house of Haman was given over to Esther, the queen, and Mordecai now became the chief counselor of Ahasuerus. What, however, was to be the fate of the unfortunate Jews against whom the king's decree had been issued? Were they to be spared? How could they be spared in the face of a decree—unalterable, according to the laws of the Medes and the Persians? The decree might not be withdrawn, but another decree could be issued that would set aside its effects, and so the severe law of the Persians might be kept in word though destroyed in spirit. To Mordecai the king now said:

“Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.”^g

So a new decree of the king went forth,

^gEsther 8:8.

“Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.”^h

Strange decree this! It really meant civil war throughout the empire!

Something like eight months, however, were to pass before the first decree of Haman was to be executed. It therefore gave the Jews an opportunity to prepare to defend themselves. They were therefore relieved from the anxiety which they must have felt in the presence of the decree of death which had befallen them. The opportunity to resist and to kill their adversaries gave them some assurance, and then there was the very important fact that Mordecai was a Jew, that he was the chief officer of the king, and that his influence throughout all the provinces of Persia must undoubtedly have been great.

It is said that fear came upon the people, “and many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.” It would be interesting to know how long they continued to be Jews, and whether they gathered subsequently with the Jews who must have gone up to Jerusalem, the heart of the Jewish world.

When the time, however, arrived at which the de-

^hEsther 8:11.

cree of the king was to be carried out, the Jews not only protected themselves, but they "gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew five hundred men at Shushan; but on the spoil they laid not their hands;" they "smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them."ⁱ

Hating the Jew. From that day even down to the present hatred has been the portion of the Jews. They have lived under the hatred of rulers, the hatred of neighbors, and the contempt of the world about them. What effect has this hatred had upon Jewish life? It has had, indeed, a very perceptible one, some of it for good, some of it for evil. In the city of Shushan the Jews slew five hundred. They slew the ten sons of Haman, and according to the practice of those days, later hanged these ten sons as an exhibition of the punishment that came to Haman and his family. In the provinces it is said seventy-five thousand were slain by the Jews, "but they laid not their hands on the prey."

This day fixed according to the decree of Haman by lot for the destruction of the Jews, became later among the Jews the festal day of Purim. From this period, 473 B. C., two days in that twelfth month Adar, or March, the Jews have celebrated the feast of Purim. It has not been generally accompanied by any particular religious ceremonies; it was

ⁱEsther 9:5.

rather two days of boisterous enjoyment, and in later times on this occasion of festival, the book of Esther was read in all the synagogues.

Thus we close the historical narrative contained in the Old Testament.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who was Herodotus?
2. How did Haman seek to end the life of Mordecai?
3. How did Esther thwart the plans of Haman?
4. What was the feast of Purim?
5. How many were slain in the provinces?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Were those whom the Jews killed in any way responsible for the king's decree passing the sentence of death upon the Jews?
2. What is the Jewish temperament that makes him offensive to other nationalities?

NOTE

Let us honestly acknowledge that Old Testament saints exhibit not a little of the spirit of vengeance. It jars upon our better feelings in many a beautiful psalm, and it has made many ask the question whether such songs should be embraced in the portions of the psalter sung in the Christian Church. We shall not enter upon the thorny subject of the imprecatory psalms further than to say that it is only upon such enemies as exhibit downright wickedness that the psalmists ask God's vengeance, and that in every case the motive seems to spring from a sense of duty and desire for God's honor. These sacred odes are not the outcome of private passion, but the psalmist identifies himself with God, and believes that God's majesty and glory are bound up with the overwhelming of His foes.—W. S. Bruce.

CHAPTER 35

JOB

(Chapters 1-7)

Sweet source of virtue,
O sacred sorrow! he who knows not thee
Knows not the best emotions of the heart,
Those tender tears that harmonize the soul,
The sigh that charms, the pang that gives delight.
—Thompson.

Having finished the narrative of Old Testament history, before going on to close up the period between Esther and Christ's advent, we shall go back in Old Testament times and learn from Job, the Psalms and Proverbs and other writings of ancient Israel, something of the thoughts, feelings, manners and customs of the people.

The story of Job has a wonderful, dramatic effect, and is perhaps one of the most beautiful as well as one of the most striking pieces of literature ever given to the world.

Job is said to have been a perfect man in his day, and his patience has been the theme of writers from his time to the present. Perfection and patience are represented in this wonderful character. President Hadley, of Yale University, has delivered a lecture printed in one of the "Worth While" series called "The Power of Patience." It is an address which represents not alone the great learning of the man,

but furnishes inspiration and guidance in the private and detailed affairs of life. "The Power of Patience" is revealed all through the story of the Old Testament, and finds its great glory in the wonderful revelations which it gives us through the Book of Job.

Job's Identity. Who was Job? He is called in his book, the man of Uz. Some say his home was across the Jordan, in the land of the Moabites; others say he was at one time king of Edom, where the descendants of Esau dwelt; others place him somewhere in the land of Arabia. When did he live and write? There are those who believe that his book should be placed between the five books of Moses and the book of Joshua. More generally, however, the book is said to be contemporary with the Psalms and the Proverbs. There is really no history of Job's life which relates him to the people of the Bible.

Job offers to the world that ever-recurring problem of the suffering of humanity (Note 2). The pain of physical and moral evil has been the companion of man from the time of his creation. From that day down to the present time men have been trying to construct a philosophy that will give the reasons for and the divine purposes of suffering. Nephi tells us that "Adam fell that man might be," that he might have an existence; that we could have no joy without knowing misery, and that after all we are created that we may have joy. But there is the ever-recurring question, Why must we come

through sorrow to reach joy? That problem presents itself to us in a most striking aspect in the book of Job. We are told that "God's whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Again, "The word of God came to the prophets saying, Comfort ye, comfort ye my people." It is a marvelous truth, we know its existence, but man has never been permitted to know its necessity.

There is a striking lesson in sorrow which comes to us through the history of the great religious reformations, revolutions and dispensations of God's providences to the world. If there is one thing which history teaches us more impressively than another, it is the fact that any important advance in religion, or the birth of a new God-given religion to the world, is accompanied by excessive sorrows and persecutions.

The birth of a new religious life, therefore, has not alone for the people that are born into it, but for the individual who experiences a spiritual birth, sorrows, troubles and disappointments never known to them or him before. Nor is the birth of a new religious life simply the advent of additional sorrow; it means also to the nation or to the individual the introduction of temptations never known before.

Study of the Book of Job. Keeping in mind certain great lessons of life, such as the sorrows of the poor, and patience, let us approach the study of the book of Job. It will interest us, but it will

do more than that; it will comfort us, and help us to bear those afflictions that, however much concealed, come to the life of every man and every woman. The language of the book itself is so charming that one almost regrets the necessity of abbreviating it, or of presenting its teachings in any other form.

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

“And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.

“His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

“And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.

“And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and arose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.”^a

Notice here the searching inquiry which Job put to himself, not about the conduct of his sons, but as to what might be in their hearts. He would go

^aJob 1:1-5.

back to the fountain of evil deeds and evil words, and check at the fountain head evil thoughts and evil feelings.

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.

“And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

“And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

“Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?

“Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

“But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

“And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.”^b

Job's Misfortunes. Thus began the series of events by which Job was tested—sorrowful events. As his servants were plowing in the field, the Sabaeans fell upon them took them away and slew them.

^bJob 6:6-12.

While the messenger who brought this announcement was speaking, another came who said that fire from heaven had fallen and burned up other servants and the sheep. Then appeared another, with the announcement that the Chaldeans fell upon his camels and the servants with them, and still another that while his sons and daughters were eating and drinking a great wind smote them and they fell dead.

“Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped,

“And said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

“In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.”^c

When the sons of God again presented themselves before the Lord, Satan came also, and again Satan was asked if he had considered the Lord’s servant Job.

“And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.

“But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.

“And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

^cJob 1:20-22.

“So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.”^d

This affliction reached the end of Job’s wife’s patience.

“Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.

“But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.”^e

Job’s Three Friends. Then there were Job’s three friends who, hearing of the evil that had befallen him, came to mourn with him and to comfort him.

“So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.”^f

Job was touched though he was not hurt. He exclaimed:

“Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived.

“Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it.”^g

He regretted himself, he regretted the day of his

^dJob 2:4-7

^eJob 2:9, 10.

^fJob 2:13.

^gJob 3:3, 4.

birth and cursed it, but there was no trace in his soul of anger against God. He bewails his own misery; he longs for death for his own bodily relief:

“I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came.”^h

His friends had listened; they had witnessed his sorrow; now they would remind him of that old Jewish law of retribution. They had perhaps heard the prophets' warning to the people of the sufferings and sorrows that would overtake them because they had violated God's laws. The prophets had warned Israel against the time of God's judgment, the time of retribution for their sins. Job must have been a man of superior ability, a leader and teacher. One of his three friends said:

“Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands.

“Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knee.

“But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.

“Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?

“Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?

“Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.

“By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed.”ⁱ

^hJob 3:26.

ⁱJob 4:3-9.

Job's Vision. A vision now came to Job, which he relates as follows:

“Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up:

“It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying,

“Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than His Maker?

“Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly:

“How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?

“They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding it.

“Doth not their excellency which is in them go away? They die, even without wisdom.”^{*j*}

Eliphaz continued his argument with the afflicted man. Was he blaming him, or was he arguing for the consolation and comfort of his afflicted friend?

“Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground;

“Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”^{*k*}

Again, he says:

“Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.”^{*l*}

^{*j*}Job 4:15-21.

^{*k*}Job 5:6, 7.

^{*l*}Job 5:17.

To these arguments Job replied,

“Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together!”^m

Job would have his sins weighed against his calamities; he believed that the latter outweighed all that he had done to offend Jehovah. The more he feels the pangs of them, the more he talks about his sorrows.

“For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.”ⁿ

From this picture no doubt Shakespeare draws wherein he speaks in Hamlet of the “arrows of outrageous fortune.” The more Job dwells upon his sorrow, the more it grows upon his mind. From his physical and mental sufferings that are real and great, he goes on to imaginary ones that are greater still, and haunt him all the more.

“What is my strength, that I should hope? and what is mine end, that I should prolong my life?”^o

He further reproves his friend when he says:

“Do ye imagine to reprove words, and the speeches of one that is desperate, which are as wind?”^p

An Admonition. Here is a striking admonition to those who pick up the words of a man in desperation or in trouble, or words that are spoken lightly, and harp upon them. Against words of no moment

^mJob 6:2.

ⁿJob 6:4.

^oJob 6:11.

^pJob 6:26.

thoughtlessly spoken, a valiant opponent never addresses himself. He that would be fair in argument, honorable and above petty contention, goes to the substance and depth of the reasons advanced by his opponent. Job became weary of his friends' arguments:

"How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?"^q

This is a very common figure of speech even among the Arabs today, who ask you to wait a moment.

Addressing his God, he asks,

"I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself?

"And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be."^r

Why did God trouble Himself so much about an inconsequential man, for Job felt in his distress as the children of God generally feel when they are overwhelmed by the littleness of their position in life, their unworthiness in the purposes of God.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who was Job?
2. Of whom did the family of Job consist?
3. Relate the conversations of Satan respecting Job.
4. What was Job's answer to his wife?
5. What was the argument of Job's friend Eliphaz?

^qJob 7:19.

^rJob 7:20, 21.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. To what extent if any has Satan power over the lives of men?
2. What is the relationship between sorrows and punishment?

NOTES

1. Professor R. G. Moulton has expressed his belief that if a jury of persons well instructed in literature were empaneled to pronounce upon the question what is the greatest poem in the world's great literature, a large majority would give their verdict in favor of the book of Job. A few judgments are worth recalling. Luther thought Job "magnificent and sublime as no other book of Scripture."—Strahan.

The greatest poem of ancient or modern times.—Tennyson.

The whole language, both of the book of Job and the Sermon on the Mount, gives precisely the view of nature which is taken by the uninvestigating affection of a humble, but powerful mind.—Ruskin.

I call it, apart from all theories about it, one of the grandest things ever written with pen.—Carlyle.

2. If we exclude disciplinary suffering as being simply a natural extension of penal or retributive, then we may say that the Old Testament offers five different attitudes to the problem of the suffering of the innocent (with the related fact of experience, the prosperity of the wicked). These five attitudes in logical, though not chronological, order, are: (1) Wait! (2) There may be life beyond death for the righteous; (3) Life is a dark mystery; (4) Life is a bright mystery of a Divine purpose higher than our grasp; (5) The suffering of the innocent may avail for the guilty. The variety of these suggestions shows how widely the problem was felt, as their fruitfulness shows its intensity. We might almost write a history of Old Testament religion around the simple account of its development.

It is clear that the second, fourth, and fifth of these attitudes or solutions mark a real advance for religion. Besides the fundamental conception of suffering as penal and disciplinary, which continues to hold its proper, if partial, place in any moral view of the world, there is (a) the reminder that the portion of life we see is incomplete, and affords no sufficient test and manifestation of disinterested religion; and (2) the conviction of its atoning value for others.—Wheeler Robinson.

CHAPTER 36

JOB (Continued)

Chapters 8-42

In parts superior what advantage lies?
Tell (for you can) what is it to be wise?
'Tis but to know how little can be known;
To see all others' faults, and feel our own.
—Pope.

Now comes Job's third friend, Bildad.

"Doth God pervert judgment, or doth the Almighty pervert justice?"

"If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression;

"If thou wouldest seek unto God betime, and make thy supplication to the Almighty;

"If thou were pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous."^a

Not much consolation in that; nor do his further observations about God's ways give Job any comfort:

"Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers."^b

Job has a terrible burden to bear. He must answer the questions that come from the depth of his

^aJob 8:2-6.

^bJob 8:20.

afflictions. He questions God and replies to his friends,

“I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God? * * *

“If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.

“Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life.”^c

He has put himself, as far as mortal can, in the place of God, and undertakes to reason about what God does from what he would do in his Maker's place. Finally he concludes that one thing is certain: “He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.”

Notice in this controversy between Job and his friends how different the afflicted man speaks when he addresses his Maker. Men speak to men sometimes in a spirit of frivolity, sometimes thoughtlessly, without regard to their foolish ways in the minds of others. When men address their Maker, notice their great deliberation, their sincerity, their earnestness, their humility in their appeal for wisdom.

Job Addresses the Lord. “My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.

“I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.

“Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress,

^cJob 9:2, 20, 21.

that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?

“Hast thou eyes of flesh? or seest thou as man seeth?

“Are thy days as the days of man? are thy years as man’s days,

“That thou enquirest after mine iniquity, and searchest after my sin? * * *

“Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me. * * *

“Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese? * * *

“If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head. I am full of confusion; therefore see thou mine affliction.”^d

These friends of Job were no ordinary men. They had evidently been the companions of his words and thoughts. They were worthy of his association, and their companionship must have been esteemed by him. The third one comes on and asks:

“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?

“It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?”^e

Peculiar Philosophy. Closing with the pecu'iar philosophy of those early days, the third friend says,

^dJob 10:1-6, 8, 10, 15.

^eJob 11:7, 8.

“But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost.”^f

Job has grown weary. Such philosophy does not help him. He becomes sarcastic, skeptical of the wisdom of his friends:

“No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you.

“But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you; yea, who knoweth not such things as these?

“I am as one mocked of his neighbor, who calleth upon God, and he answereth him: the just upright man is laughed to scorn.

“He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease.”^g

What a wonderful admonition is contained in those last words! How ready are those who stand at ease to despise those whose steps falter, or who slip on the pavements! Note what Job says of the wicked:

“The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.

“But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee.”^h

^fJob 11:20.

^gJob 12:2-5.

^hJob 12:6, 7.

May as well ask them, for man cannot answer these great problems of his life. He may speculate about them, he may pray about them, but they are problems with which man has wrestled from his earliest existence; they are problems unsolved, and await the great final day of God's judgment, when Jehovah's purposes may, let us hope, be revealed in a fuller light, than we see them today.

Job is Weary. Job's friends have wearied him; he needed comfort; it was God's mercies which his soul craved, God's loving kindness that was needed to heal his affliction; it was not argument; it was not reason. How often it happens in life that men believe they can help us if their reasons are strong and their arguments difficult to answer! How often we speak to the ears of men when their ears are closed, but their hearts opened! How prone men are in a spirit of desperation to argue their case before God, to question His ways and His judgments! But the arguments of men do not reach him; to him their wisdom is of little consequence. He wants his children to trust him, and by trusting him, learn to love Him. Such a spirit takes hold upon Job, and he says, from the fulness of his heart,

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. * *

"He also shall be my salvation: for a hypocrite shall not come before him."ⁱ

The thought of his own sins did not leave Job.

ⁱJob 13:15, 16.

From his youth he has grown in the spirit of perfection. Is it possible that the Lord remembers the follies of his youth? He confesses them:

“For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.

“Thou putttest my feet also in the stocks, and lookest narrowly unto all my paths; thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet.

“And he, as a rotten thing, consumeth, as a garment that is motheaten.”^j

In the same spirit David appeals to the tender mercy and loving kindness of the Lord:

“Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness’s sake, O Lord.”^k

Job continues to ask of his friends,

“Hear diligently my speech, and let this be your consolations.

“Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on.

“As for me, is my complaint to man? and if it were so, why should not my spirit be troubled?”^l

Job Appeals to God. Job gets little satisfaction from his friends, neither do arguments bring him consolation or assurance. These arguments go on apparently day after day. Finally Job appeals to his God; he endeavors to put himself in the place of God; he reasons about the wonderful works of God

^jTob 13:26-28.

^kPsalms 25:7.

^lJob 21:2-4.

and concludes that if the handiworks of God are far beyond his comprehension, how is it possible for him to understand them. Job examines his own heart:

“I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?

“For what portion of God is there from above? and what inheritance of the Almighty from on high? * * *

“If mine heart have been deceived by a woman, or if I have laid wait at my neighbor’s door;

“Then let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her. * * *

“For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure.

“If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence;

“If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much. * * *

“This also were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.”^m

He then speaks about the hospitality of his home, and claims that he did right in spite of any fear of the multitude. Finally he exclaims:

“Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desires, that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book.”ⁿ

Here book means a scroll, a manuscript, so to

^mJob 31:1, 2, 9, 10, 23, 24, 25, 28.

ⁿJob 31:35.

speaking, an indictment, setting forth those things of which he was accused. This passage of Scripture is often misquoted, for it has no reference to the adversary of Christ, or the enemy of His work.

Elihu Speaks. There enters then into this controversy another and younger man, Elihu, who waited while his elders were in disputation with the wise man; he had shown respect to his elders by his hesitation:

“I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.

“But there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.

“Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment.

“Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will shew mine opinion.”^o

The Lord Answers Job. But these opinions, these reasons and these arguments of his fellow men did not help Job to solve the problem of his sorrows. Finally, the Lord answers Job out of the whirlwind:

“Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

“Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

^oJob 32:7-10.

“Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

“Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

“When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”^p

The Lord here makes reference to Job in his primeval childhood. Jehovah shows him how little he knows of the wonderful creations of his Maker. Man is willing to yield to the laws of nature and accept punishment when he knows those laws have been violated by him. Here then, he may not complain against God, whose purposes he cannot understand, and whose ways are only in small part revealed to man's understanding.

Job's Need. What Job needs, what all men need, is the spirit of appreciation,—appreciation of the wonderful handiwork of God. It is appreciation that gives such a wonderful value to life. One ounce of appreciation, properly bestowed, is worth a ton of gold. And Job must learn what every man must understand before he comes to wisdom or reaches happiness,—that he must appreciate his Maker. Finally the wise man submits himself to God.

“I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

“Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood

^pJob 38:2-7.

not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not."^q

Job was commanded to make an offering.

"Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.

"So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses.

"He had also seven sons and three daughters.

"And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch.

"And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren.

"After this lived Job a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations.

"So Job died, being old and full of days."^r

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the argument of Job's third friend, Bildad?
2. How does ease endanger our judgments and mercy?

^qJob 42:2, 3.

^rJob 42:11-17.

CHAPTER 37

PSALMS

Characteristics. Whenever we have progressed sufficiently in the question of dependence and in the knowledge of our own weakness and in the needs of divine aid, there is nothing more pleasing to the thoughts and feelings of men than to study the book of Psalms. There is something in these songs of David that gives them an eternal freshness. There is something in them that touches our lives where our experiences are deepest and tenderest.

There is, too, about the Psalms, such a diversity of joys, loves, hopes, fears, confidences and sorrows, remorse and sadness, that we may, if we seek these sacred songs, find comfort and consolation. They are the repairers of men's broken souls. They are the spirit of the lowly, and the consolation of the repentant sinner. Some were read in the congregations of the people, and some were sung in the temple of worship.

The Psalms, too, lead us into lives of appreciation. From them we gain the joy that comes from the praises we utter to Jehovah. Through the Psalms of David we are made to feel some divine joy in the unhappiest moods to which human life is given. The Psalms, too, are the companions of solitude. They point out the way to self-rectification, and help us enjoy communion with God. It is not possible in this life to meet its temptations, its

difficulties, and its troubles without wounding our souls. - To heal the wounds with which life afflicts us, there is a great help in the repetition of the sweet and comforting words of the Psalms of ancient Israel.

The Psalms were not all the work of David. They refer to the Babylonian captivity long after his death. Two are ascribed to Solomon, twelve to Asaph, and one, the 19th, to Moses.

A Contrast. The opening Psalm reads:

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

“The ungodly are not so; but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

“Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

“For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”^a

The Greatness of the Creator. “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

^aPs. 1:1-6.

“What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?”

“For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.

“Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.”^b

The Happiness of Those Who Are Forgiven.—

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

“Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long.

“For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

“I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

“For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

“Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah. * * *

“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he

^bPs. 8:3-6.

that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.

“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.”^c

Rewards and Punishment. The Psalmist has warned us against the wicked, to whom are imputed prosperity. He does not explain the reason for it; he does the only wise thing to do; he leaves them to the Lord, and puts himself in harmony with the divine will. Quoting Psalm 37:

“Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity:

“For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. * * *

“Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way. * * *

“For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. * * *

“I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. * * *

“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.

“Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.

“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.”^d

^c Ps. 32:1-7; 10, 11.

^dPs. 37:1, 2, 7, 10, 25, 35-37.

The Cry of Sin. A Psalm of David after Nathan the Prophet had rebuked the king for his sin against Uriah:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.

“Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

“For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me.

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

“Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

“Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

“Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

“Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit:

“Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

“Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

“O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

“For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

“Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.

“Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.”^e

This is sometimes said to be the most universally read of the Psalms. It is certainly one of the most beautiful, and is here given in full.

The 137th Psalm depicts the sadness of the Jews in Babylon, and it is one of the most universally quoted of the Psalms.

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion;

“We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

“For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song: and they that wasted us, re-

^eP_s 51.

quired of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?

“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

“If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”^f

Note—As chapters 37 and 38 are given for meditation and discussion, no review questions are attached.

^fPs. 137:1-6.

CHAPTER 38

PROVERBS

Character of the Proverbs. One of the most widely quoted books of the Old Testament is the Proverbs of Solomon. They may contain more than the sayings of this wise man. Whether he collected them or not, they represent to us the wisdom of the age chiefly subsequent to his time. When the Hebrews came in contact with the Greeks, it was the boast of the former that their wisdom greatly exceeded the knowledge of the Greeks. During an age when the heavens were said to be as brass, and the word of the Lord was not had among the people, the Hebrews rejoiced, nevertheless in the wisdom of Solomon. Proverbs became, in a measure, a substitute for inspiration and prophetic declaration. They represented the prudence, the wisdom, which God, through inspiration, had imparted to men. It is sometimes said that the teachings of Solomon were very distinct from those of Christ, and that the latter taught love while the former taught prudence; but after all, do not prudence and wisdom originate in love? The proverbs, at any rate, were an excellent preparation for the coming of the Son of Man, and aided the Jews in receiving His teachings when carried to them by His early followers, the Apostles.

The Phraseology of the Proverbs. The method

of expression which we find in the Proverbs is something peculiar to Asiatic nations. They are all more or less a meditative people. Their silences are broken in expressions of wonder and admiration and love for the things that for months and years may have absorbed their souls. There is an elegance of expression in these proverbs. There is an acuteness and directness that are stimulating and convincing. They afford the reader an excellent opportunity for deliberation, and they deal in such a way with the practical affairs of life that he who misses them has lost the guide post to the best chosen road of success in life.

The Asiatics are moralists; their literature is full of such ethical expressions as are found in the Book of Proverbs, which is the best book of the kind ever written. To the wise men of course these proverbs were a source of great inspiration, and it is said by some that they found matters of wisdom of more application among the Greeks than with the Hebrews. Yet the Greeks called all who were not of their race, barbarians.

The Book of Proverbs a Balance Wheel. One who has read the political history of the Jews would obtain a very imperfect judgment of their character and of their lives, unless he read in correction of that judgment the Book of Proverbs. It is a kind of balance wheel. It shows up the religion and morality of the people, who constantly quoted the sayings of Solomon in public and private life. That was an age of memory, and the knowledge of men

was measured by the extent and quality of their quotations.

Proverbs was a book not only of inspiration, but of information. Many scholars of those days learned to repeat from memory every word of their wise men, and the Book of Proverbs did much to educate the motives that actuated the Jews from the days of their return down to the time of the coming of the Son of Man. It is impossible to understand the character, the aspirations, the hopes of that remarkable people without a knowledge of those great sentiments that swayed the nation in the hours of both its prosperity and its adversity.

A Day of Reckoning. The Proverbs are full of warnings that there are peculiar days in the lives of men as of nations—days of reckoning. They teach that God hath ordained times and seasons when men and nations shall harvest the fruits, bitter or sweet, that come from their conduct in life. But there are days of good, and there are days of evil, and it shall be given to men to receive the days of good with understanding hearts, and to escape the days of evil that torment the lives of men.

“The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.”^a

Intimacy of God. There is one beautiful characteristic about the Book of Proverbs, which creates intimacy between man and God. It is not a feeling of fear, awe, admiration, and wonderment; it is a feeling of companionship, friendship, personal asso-

^aProv. 16:4.

ciation, and fraternal good-will. It is impossible, perhaps, to feel this intimacy between man and God without a belief in a primeval existence. When a people become strongly imbued with the thought that there existed between man and God a personal relationship prior to the creation, they are more fully prepared for his companionship in life.

“The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. * * *

“When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. * * *

“Then I was by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him:

“Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.”^b

What a revelation of the great principle that the brotherhood of man is something more than an earthly condition. Brotherhood was a delight, a necessity for the happiness and joy of human existence. The further we get from that brotherhood the sadder life becomes to us. Are we trying today to establish the belief that we have within us the needed means of our spiritual subsistence and our joy? There can be no delight in self-sufficiency, no satisfaction in our separation from the sons of God.

Warnings of the Proverbs. The Proverbs were

^bProv. 8:22, 24, 30, 31.

full of warning. The young man in the first chapter was asked to stop and listen:

“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother;

“For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

“My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

“If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause.”^c

How foolish it is in the young to be boastful of their vain innocence, innocence which they feel they have themselves alone the power to protect. The young are also warned in the same chapter against the selfishness of youth, against its greedy ambitions:

“So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.”^d

It is owing to the fullness of our life that we are unable to enjoy what we possess. If we possess a gain which we are unable to enjoy, of what happiness or benefit is it? Is it a gain to us? It is what the man of proverbs calls an “unjust gain.”

The wise man warns against unchastity:

“Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye.

“Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.

^cProv. 1:8-11.

^dProv. 1:19.

“Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman:

“That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words.”^e

Lessons of Wisdom. The ancients, in the wise sayings of Solomon, were taught the laws of the higher freedom of life. They were taught how to avoid the adversary, and to be free from those who rule over the conduct of man:

“Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things.

“For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

“All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them.”^f

Let men eschew the things which God hates, for Proverbs tells us that:

“These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him:

“A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,

“An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief,

“A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”^g

These are seven things every man should lay to

^eProv. 7:2-5.

^fProv. 8:6-8.

^gProv. 6:16-19.

heart. that he be guilty of none of them. How shall he lay them to heart, except he repeat them and so impress them upon both his mind and his feelings that they become a part of those heart-felt incentives which we call the true emotions of life?

Lessons of Obedience. Nothing stands out more prominently in the exhortations of the wise man than the benefit that comes from keeping scrupulously the laws of obedience:

“I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment:

“That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.”^h

Discretion. Christ has said that we should not cast pearls before swine. How difficult it is to understand the law of discretion. What a troublous thing to us the unruly member sometimes becomes:

“The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall.

“He that walketh uprightly walketh surely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known. * * *

“In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.

“Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.

“The rich man’s wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty.

^hProv. 8:19, 20.

“The labor of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin.”ⁱ

“Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.”^j

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”

“A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. * * *

“Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility.

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is shame and folly unto him.”^k

Miscellaneous Proverbs. “Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.”^l

Too much sleep is the companion of idleness; when once the needs of life are duly satisfied, more is a danger. It misleads us.

“Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee.”^m

“He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.”ⁿ

“The horse is prepared against the day of battle; but safety is of the Lord.”^o

“A good name is rather to be chosen than great

ⁱProv. 10:8-9, 13-16.

^jProv. 9:8.

^kProv. 18:7, 12, 13.

^lProv. 20:13.

^mProv. 20:22.

ⁿProv. 21:17.

^oProv. 21:31.

riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold.

“The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.

“A prudent man forseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

“By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life. * * *

“The rich ruleth over the poor. and the borrower is servant to the lender.

“He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity; and the rod of his anger shall fail.”^p

Note—As chapters 37 and 38 are given for meditation and discussion, no review questions are attached.

^pProv. 22:1-4, 7, 8.

CHAPTER 39

THE GREEK AND ROMAN PERIOD

“A God all mercy is a God unjust.”

Jewish Peculiarities. The return of the Jews to Palestine marked a change in Jewish life whose peculiarities have survived in a large part down to the present. The exile had showed them the futility of becoming or even of attempting to become like any other people. The history of ancient Israel before the exile is the story of Israel's segregation—the making of a peculiar people.

The exile completed the process of moulding a people into a system of laws and form of worship which should ever after distinguish them from all others. They were taken out of the harmony which belongs to the natural trend of life, and made to know that the “natural man is an enemy to God.” They were not only to be made unlike any other people, but they were also to be made unlike themselves.

From that time, throughout the many centuries to the present, they have been considered obstinate, stubborn, inharmonious and obsolete, without knowing it. Unlike the world at large, they have been without shifting ideals. They are worshipers, in the general estimate of civilized nations, of an old fashioned God. They are therefore out of the social and economic, as well as the religious fashion of modern times.

Jewish Isolation. The process of absorption of such a people became impossible. When the Jews returned to Palestine they were scattered. Many preferred to remain in the solitary regions about, to avoid the dangers that belonged to besieged cities. The Jews never recovered such a political solidarity as they had before the exile. They were not only scattered in their own land, but also in the surrounding nations. It was difficult to conceal their race identity, and they therefore suffered wherever they went.

Their resistance became an individual, rather than a national, quality. They could not hope for national protection, and therefore sought protection in the law, the law which Moses had delivered to their forefathers, and which contained promises of divine intervention in their behalf. Such a law they could respect more than ever because its fulfillment was easily traced in their own history.

Greek Intervention. Between them and the Greeks with whom they immediately after their return came into contact, there was a conflict respecting the law of Jehovah and Greek philosophy. Philosophy lay along the line of least resistance, the line so universally traveled. One teaches responsibility to man, chiefly man's own self, the other, responsibility to God. The latter responsibility was outlined in the law of Moses, the highest and most difficult law man has ever attempted to live.

The Spread of the Law. The scattered Jews in all western Asia and Egypt were organized into con-

gregations, schooled by reading and interpreting the law. The law was made a substitute for the living oracles of David's time. Daniel and others in exile became ideal types of devotion. Thus the Jews and Greeks came face to face in a struggle which lasted down to the time of the Master.

Greece was a small country, and its people were early in their national life drawn into commercial enterprises that made them the sailors and merchants of those times. Trade had sharpened their wits; made them aggressive; and at the same time unscrupulous and immoral. Their religion, fostered by acts of bravery and adventure, consisted largely of heroism, and their gods were their ideals of valor and power.

Spread of the Greeks. They soon overran western Asia and Egypt and came in contact with the Persians whom they conquered. Alexander, in his conquests of Persia, also subjected the Egyptians and Jews to his rule. After his death, in 333 B. C., his kingdom was divided among his six generals.

Two of these divisions, which included Syria, north of Palestine, and Egypt, south of it, are important in Jewish history. Egypt fell to the Ptolemies and Syria to the Seleucids, and between them there grew up fierce conflicts for the possession of Palestine. The Jews, however, were poor, and their treasures did not excite the cupidity of their captives.

At first they enjoyed considerable religious freedom. Their exile and the scattering to which they

had been subjected did much to make out of them a commercial people, and competition with the Greeks passed into rivalry, hatred, and national enmities, which have continued down to our own times.

The Rise of the Maccabees. Unfortunately for the Jews, class distinctions between the rich and poor gave rise to animosities that made the inroad of foreign customs and thought easy. The poor soon fell under oppression. They were the peasants of the land (fellaheen), the owners of cattle and such live stock as made it easy to fix the heavier burdens of taxes upon them.

Their rich brethren, to be in fashion,—up to date,—fraternized with the Greeks, whose pleasure loving habits made them congenial to those Jews who grew indifferent to the law and preferred to compromise their religious convictions for the sake of harmony in a pleasure-loving age.

The oppression of the poor may be readily comprehended from the nature of the taxes collected in those times. They consisted of one-third the grain, one-half the fruit, and then there were poll taxes. For public work, enforced labor could be required, the so-called corvee. The military authorities had the right to seize horses and cattle for war uses. There were crown taxes and temple taxes. In addition, the people had their religious obligations to meet.

They were sorely afflicted. Hard as these burdens were, they were borne till their religious

rights were denied them, and they suffered insults through the determination of the rulers to enforce upon the Jews certain pagan rites.

The Wars of the Maccabees. The hog was an unclean animal. Its use in ritual service was the most debasing condition the Jews could suffer. Certain Jews were ordered to assemble at Modein. Here a Syrian official set up a heathen altar on which he ordered an aged priest to offer up a hog as a burnt offering.

The priest, Mattathias, refused, and when an apostate Jew came forward to perform the service, the aged priest slew both him and the Syrian official. Mattathias and his sons, John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan, thereupon fled to the mountains, where they received followers and began guerilla warfare, which finally resulted in a temporary victory.

After the death of the father, Judas became their leader and began what were called the wars of the Maccabees, or Asmaneans, as they are also called. The word Maccabee signifies "the extinguisher." The zealous defenders of the law in the beginning refused to fight on the Sabbath, and were almost annihilated.

For a long time the Jews were in just as troublesome times as those in which they suffered before the exile. During these sanguinary wars the faith of the Jews had been saved, and the warriors had been nerved to the great deeds they performed in a large measure by the example of Daniel and the

other Hebrew children. It was during these times that the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees grew to be such powerful organizations among the Jews, a condition that continued until the coming of the Savior.

At last the Jews made peace with Rome. In those days Rome was fighting against the greater nations and was always glad to make treaties with the territories of great nations, as it afforded that growing empire excuses for meddling at first, and afterwards for fighting. Word came finally from Rome to the Syrians that the latter were not to trouble the people of Jerusalem.

The Romans came rapidly into power, when once their conquest of Western Asia began; but under them the Jews fared better than they had under the Greeks. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans may be said to have been a religious people. Their worship was subordinate to their rule, and the Romans were very generous in allowing each of the nations that came under their domination to worship as it saw fit.

The Romans, however, were oppressive,—they were tax-gatherers, and held in certain disdain all subjected races. But Western Asia at this time was seething in an atmosphere of discontent. The different races and peoples were at civil discord one with another. Local hatreds and jealousies often gave the Romans a great deal of trouble.

It was during their administration of the government of Palestine that the Messiah made His ad-

vent. He found His fellow countrymen in a state of stubborn resistance. They were suffering from a malady from which they saw no road to recovery.

They were looking for a Deliverer, and when He came they crucified Him. With Christ came the breaking down of the civilizations that were in existence at the meridian of time, and the early beginning of the civilization that was to characterize our modern age.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long were the Jews in exile?
2. What effect did the exile have upon the Jews?
3. What gave rise to the great emphasis which the Jews put upon the law after their return from Babylon?
4. In what condition did the Jews find Palestine upon their return from exile?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Name some of the chief differences between the law of the Jews and the philosophy of the Greeks.
2. From what part of the country did the settlement of the Jews extend after the return of a remnant of them?
3. What was the original home of the Greeks?
4. Over what countries did the conquests of Alexander extend?
5. Who were the Maccabees?

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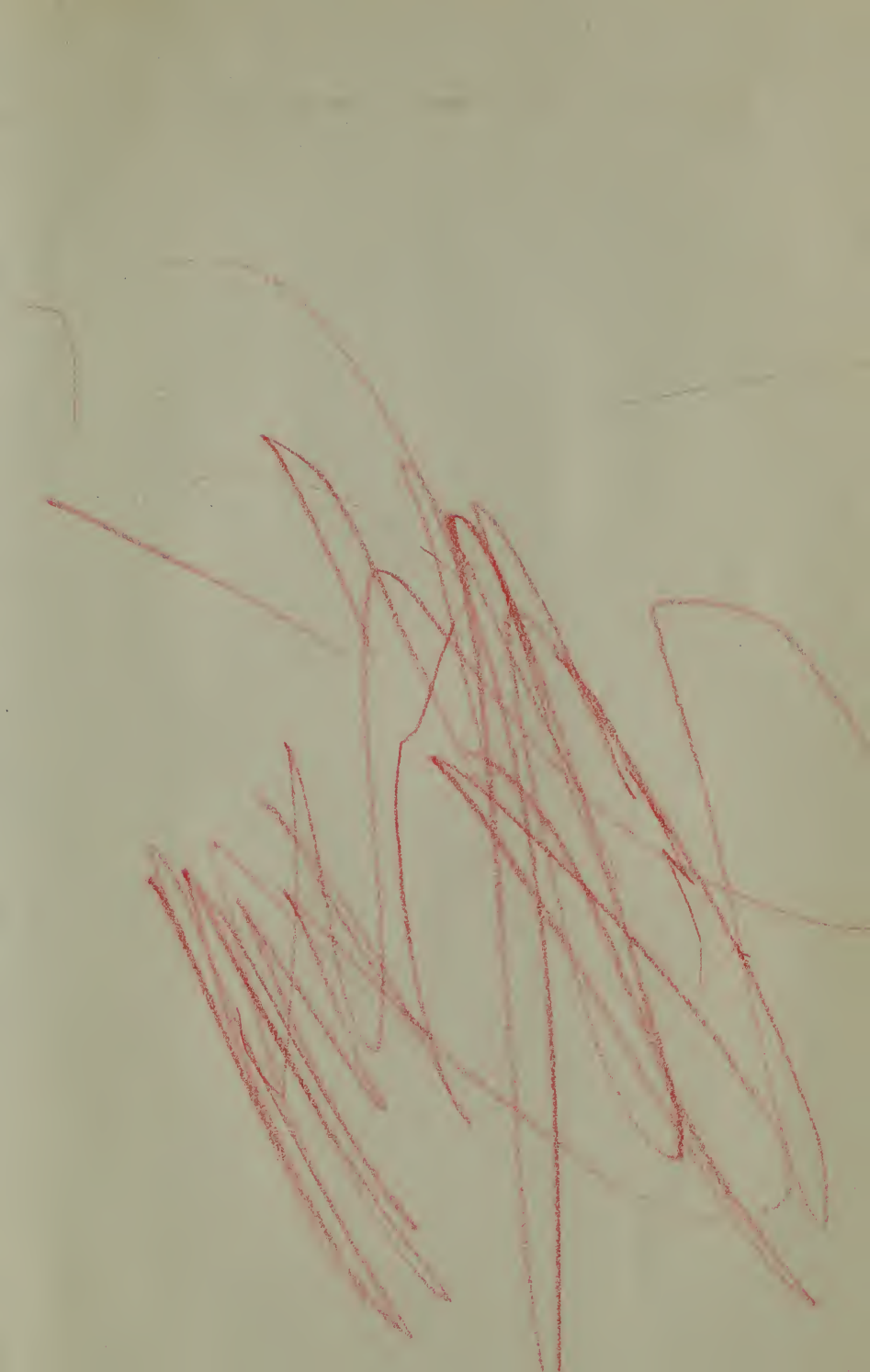
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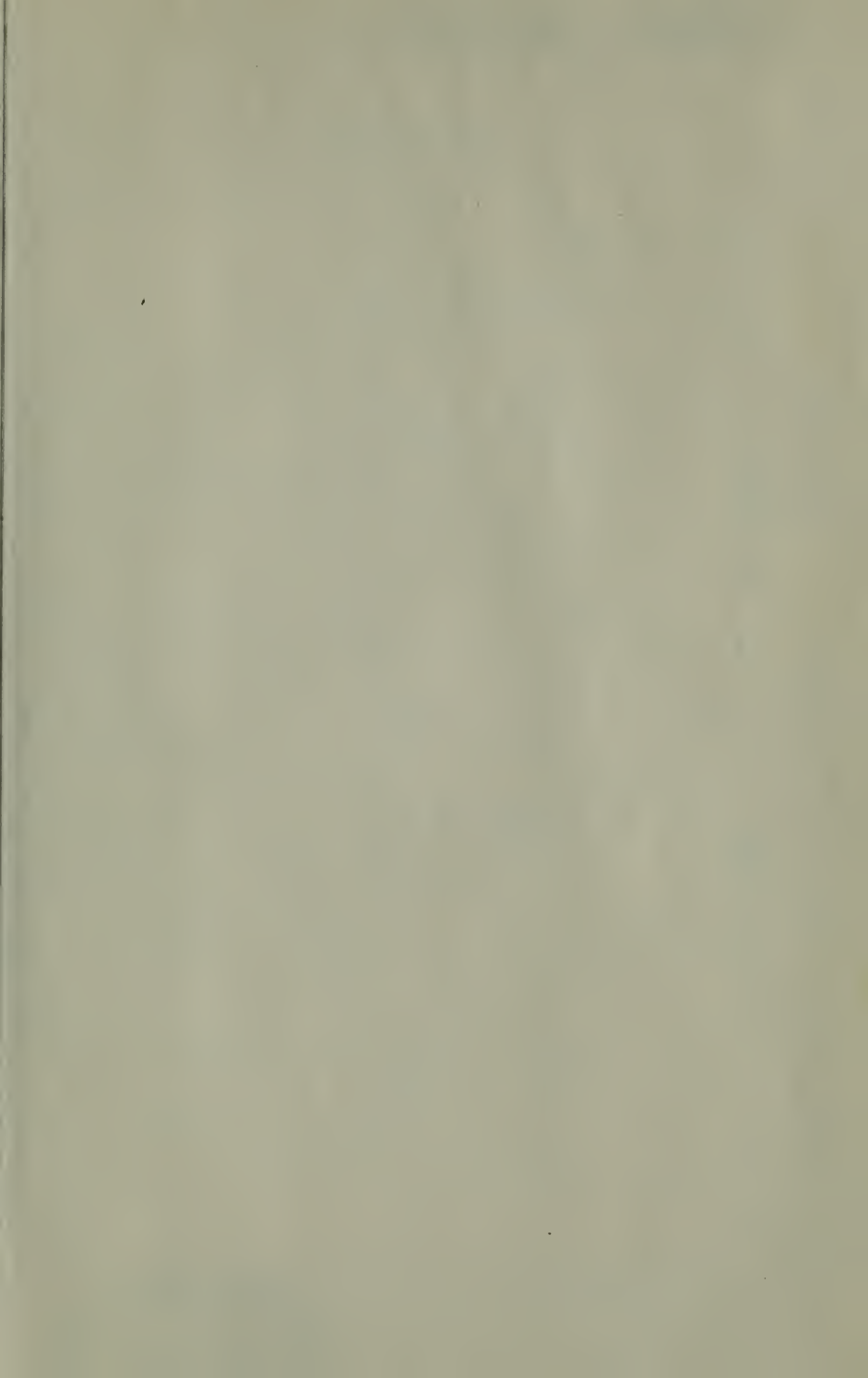
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